

*jeevadhara*

Jeevadhara ; a journal of  
Christian interpretation

155

Sep 1996

PROCESSED

MAR 03 1997

GTU LIBRARY

## **THE CHALLENGE OF EVANGELIZATION TODAY**

---

Edited by

John B. Chethimattam

ISSN 0970 - 1125

Vol. XXVI No. 155

# JEEVADHARA

is published every month  
alternately in English and Malayalam

## GENERAL EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

## SECTION EDITORS

*The Human Problem*

Felix Wilfred

C. Thomas Abraham

*The Word of God*

Augustine Mulloor

Mathew Variamattom

*The Living Christ*

Sebastian Painadath

Jose Panthackal

*The People of God*

Kuncheria Pathil

George Karakunnel

*The Meeting of Religions*

John B. Chethimattam

Thomas Manninezhath

*The Fulness of Life*

Thomas Srampickal

Mathew Paikada

Manager: Jose Pollayil

## SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

Thomas Manickam

Thomas Manninezhath

John Peter Muringathery

Joseph Manickam

## EDITOR - BOOK REVIEW

J. B. Chethimattam

# jeervadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

---

## The Challenge of Evangelization Today

Edited by

**John B. Chethimattam**

Jeevadhara

Kottayam - 686 041

Kerala, India

Tel.(91) (481) 597430

# CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	325
The Challenges of Evangelization in India at the Threshold of the Third Millennium	329
<i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	
Christian Encounter with Igbo Traditional Religion Models for Interpreting Religious Change in Igboland, Nigeria	348
<i>Felix N. Nwaghagi</i>	
A Unique Experiment in Missionary Work	359
<i>Mathew Kaniamparampil</i>	
Interreligious Dialogue: a Sharing of Hope	367
<i>Jacob Parappally</i>	
Missionary Dimension of Islam	378
<i>George Koovackal</i>	
Hindu Missionary History and Methods	392
<i>Antony Mookenthottam</i>	
Book Review	404
<i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	



## Editorial

Today there is a general awareness that the religious history of humanity is one. All that happened in history, whether it is the illumination of the Buddha under the bodhi tree or the composition of the Vedas by the ancient sages belong equally to all humans. Hence both exclusivism which claims that one religion alone is true and all others are wrong and inclusivism which says that truths contained in other religions are all included in one's own are wrong; these pit one religion against others. Similarly wrong is pluralism that looks at different religions as parallel ways of faith, like different rivers flowing into the same ocean or different routes leading to the same summit. Even when it says that all religions are equally inadequate like the efforts of blind men trying to give a picture of an elephant, it forgets that all religions appeal to the same really Real, who alone brings all things to their final fulfilment. In this situation the task of communicating one's faith to others appears as a new challenge today. For it is no longer a question of proving myself right and others wrong, but rather explaining the faith tradition I represent and showing what it contributes to the common religious history and what demands it makes on all human beings.

This is particularly significant for Christian missions, which have a colonial tradition as their background. When Emperor Constantine became Christian, it was actually the Western Church that was converted to the imperial ways of Constantine and assumed a mission to conquer the whole world for Christ, the King of kings. In fact this militant outlook was the common characteristic of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, each of which was born under the domination of a foreign culture, had a philosophy and world-vision for defending and imposing it on others, and appealed to a sacred book of its own as the source of authority. All these religions that came to the world-scene during the Axial Period of 900-200 BC, including Buddhism and Hinduism were militant and expansionist at one time or another in their histories especially when they came under the control of political powers.

For Christians this conquest motive remained central to the work of evangelization not only throughout the duration of the Roman Empire, but also down the centuries to the end of the colonial era of Western powers. Even half-a-century after the demise of imperial rule, the ideal still remains somewhat the same; the Church simply stepped into the position of the empire: Mission is still spoken of as planting the Church, establishing the authority of the church-appointed officials affecting all the details of a human's life, [defining their territories and expanding their jurisdictions.

Getting out of this straight jacket created by past Western ecclesiologies and re-defining the function of evangelization is the basic task of Indian theologians. A neglect of the proper scope of theology, its sources and specific method is at the root of the present confusion regarding the scope and meaning of evangelization. From one extreme of conquering and dominating the world mission theology has today gone to the opposite extreme of keeping total silence over one's faith, treating religion as a purely private matter and leaving each one to the religion of his own sweet will and pleasure. Theology itself has degenerated into comparative religion, in which effort is made to reduce all religions to a common preconceived philosophical framework. This is done to facilitate dialogue and peaceful co-existence with all religions. But it definitely does injustice not only to Christianity but to all other religions as well.

For, religions are all not saying the same thing, nor are they even religions in the same sense. Indeed, as St. Peter stated to Centurion Cornelius, God has no partiality. He is available to all who seek him sincerely. The divine salvific revelation made both in the creation of all things as well as in specific events of divine providence in human history, is ultimately the availability and personal presence to us of God as the ground of our very being and the final goal of our life. The common starting point of all religions is faith: the divine gift to all individuals without any personal merit. But how that faith gets expressed from the side of human beings in history, in social institutions and in each one's personal life is the distinguishing factor among religions. It will be simplistic to reduce all religions to a bunch of 'truths' concerning God and the meaning.



and goal of human life. Though all religions are relative to the ultimate Reality they look for, they are not relative to each other. Each religion is an integral experience, and hence it is artificial to isolate from it some element as a core value.

Each religion born in a particular historical situation tends to emphasize one or other coordinate of human existence like the psychological side of religious experience, social reality, history and metaphysics, and from that angle tries to deal with other coordinates. Each religion has to see its unique tradition within the context of the total religious history of the human race. Even those who attach primary importance to an inner experience of God as the Self of their own selves cannot ignore the reality of their historical existence, and the importance of the historical tradition even for their religious knowledge. It is, however, in the total context of their own religious tradition that believers of one religion have to discover the truth and value of other faiths. For example, it is as part of their history and tradition that Hindus have to discover the person and message of Jesus, while Islam has to encounter him as the Prophet among prophets, and Buddhism can meet him as the Enlightened One, whose light illumines everyman coming into the world. Dialogue and evangelization are complementary: Dialogue seeks to present each religion in its best light, while mission work seeks to communicate one's religion's best to others.

Another source of confusion in the work of evangelization today is the manner one deals with the different Scriptures. The holy books of the different religions, though all held in veneration, do not mean the same thing.

So in devoting this issue of *Jeevadhara* to a study of the challenge of the work of evangelization today our intention is to raise questions that merit the attention and concerted effort of all believers. In my article I try to present a general theological overview of the issues involved. For the sake of history Dr. Antony Mookenthottam discusses the expansion of Hinduism down the centuries replacing Buddhism and other traditional religions of India. Dr. Felix N. Nwaghagi brings an example from Africa by discussing "Christian Encounter with Igbo Traditional Religion". Dr. Jacob Parappally gives a general overview of various Christian attempts to come to terms with the Indian religions in recent times.

Fr. James Kaniyampuram gives a phenomenological description of the new missionary outlook established by Bishop Januarius Palathinkal in the diocese of Chanda. These papers are followed by a brief review of some recent books on evangelization not in opposition to other religions but rather in collaboration with them.

Calcutta

John B. Chethimattam



# **The Challenges of Evangelization in India at the Threshold of the Third Millennium**

The author, after seeking for the deeper roots of the long history of the missionary failure in India, which he finds in the bad philosophy and the kind of theology taught in the seminaries with its still lingering western traits, is advocating an evangelisation in collaboration with other religions. Finally the main characteristics of the New Evangelisation are clearly explained and its programme of action delineated.

## **The Problem**

Why have the past two millennia of Christian missionary work in India produced such meagre results? Is the third millennium going to be any different? Of course, we make the Western colonialism of the last three or four hundred years the scape goat for all our missionary failures. But it is almost half a century since the colonialists left us free, and Independent India was on its own with freedom and the right to preach our religion and make converts guaranteed in the Constitution. Have matters in any way improved? In terms of missionary activity and results, all admit, that we have only deteriorated. Were matters any better during the thirteen centuries that went before the colonial period? Even the East Syrian Church which was characterised as a "Church on fire" and sent its missionaries even to the Far East, did not make any appreciable impact on the Indian people. So the first challenge of evangelization in India at the threshold of the third millennium is to find the deeper roots of the long history of missionary failure. At the same time one has also to recognize that traditional religions, which affected every aspect of human existence, have also been a source of division and systematically sacralized interreligious wars. Hence an equally urgent task of mission work is to proclaim one's faith without creating interreligious rivalries and conflicts.

The Westward movement of the Christian faith from the Judaic Palestine, even beginning with the Apostles became a

success story only when the mass of Gentile converts to Christianity prevailed against the Judaic Christians, who were a minority, to embrace the superior culture of the West and to jettison the apparently pragmatic and anthropomorphic spiritual outlook of the Old Testament and to baptize the mystical bent of Platonism and Neo-Platonism. This of course alienated the Jews for ever, but enabled the Church to grow and to convert in a few centuries the whole of Europe and the greater part of North Africa, until the fire and spirit of Islam supplanted the Christian faith in most of the Middle East and North Africa. This cultural conversion of Christians did not ever take place with regard to India, and even with all the ongoing talk about inculturation it has not taken place even today. Hence not only the work of evangelization did not succeed but further through an aggressive missionary policy it alienated people of other faiths.

### 1. A Wrong Philosophy for the Mission

The root cause of our missionary failure is that it is inspired and supported by a wrong philosophy. If what helped Christianity in the West was the Greek philosophy, it was radically opposed to the philosophy that inspired the Indian religious outlook from ancient times. Greek philosophy started with the bafflement at the phenomena of nature, considered knowledge itself as a faithful reporting of the object out there, meaning as the reference of words to things and events and error as wrong predication. Causality was the relation among phenomena as matter, form, agent and goal pointing to a Supreme Being. The Hebrews by the time of their Babylonian captivity had come to conceive God in the image of those Middle Eastern monarchs like Darius or Nebuchdnesser and later in the fashion of Alexander the Great, an extremely rational overlord, carefully planning to bring all nations under his rule and governance. Going West this supreme conqueror gained also the sharpness of mind of a Greek philosopher.

Matthew's scene of the sending of the Apostles to convert all nations is conceived in the fashion of the enthronement ceremony of the Middle Eastern potentates: Father gives Jesus all power and glory. The disciples come and worship him. Then he gives them the commission to go and bring all nations to submission to the Triune God. This surely is not a very attractive and acceptable

image of a spiritual message for the Indian people, whose philosophy focussed attention on the problem of human suffering. It considered knowledge an act of the spirit illumining by its light the material sphere of being. For its meaning was the communication of the eternal value of words, and truth something to be added to the impressions of things through the *pramanas* or the means of right knowledge. Doubt was hesitation arising out of the inadequacy of the *pramanas*, and error itself centred around apprehension, seeing something where nothing was, projecting oneself or seeing one thing for another. Causality, in fact, was essentially the relation to the ground of being, the one maternal womb from which everything emerged, and hence the really Real was immanent as the Self of one's own self.

The Western missionary enterprise was fully inspired by the Graeco-Roman philosophical outlook. European countries went out to colonise other nations under the presumed command of the Supreme Deity, to conquer all lands for Christ. In South Africa the practitioners of apartheid gave a religious justification in the name of Christianity to their policy of suppressing the human rights of 83% of the population. Though it is true that the Gospel is preached to the poor in spirit, it cannot be denied, however, that sometimes conversions were secured by taking advantage of the poverty of the people through the incentives of financial help, social upward mobility and better job opportunities. The political form of colonialism is over today. Missionary methods which followed colonial practices are also discredited. There are strong protests today against individual conversions, planting of the church and taking conversion-statistics. Our official spokesmen going to the opposite extreme, even deny the very missionary character of the Church and state in public forums that it is not our explicit or implicit intention to convert anybody. Many are repeating the words of Swami Vivekananda at the first World Parliament of Religions: "Do I want Christians to become Hindus? God forbid! Do I want Hindus to become Christians? God forbid!" But the irony is that the very reaction to colonial methods in missions is inspired still by a secret colonialist philosophy. Our whole theology and its missiology are still Western. Just as the old missiology was inspired by a wrong theology, today the opposition to evangelization comes from an equally wrong Western theological thinking.



A brief review of the main arguments against mission work can make this clear.

## 2. Theology against Mission

Today what hurts mission work most is a theology taught in our seminaries which rejects the work of conversion as a left-over of colonialism. Since today the majority of humanity follow world religions other than Christianity, religious pluralism is a fact, and there is no prospect that the Gospel will ever supplant them. So it is better to be satisfied with dialogue with other religions than to jeopardize that dialogue by our firm faith in the universal validity and relevance of Christianity for all human beings. There are several lines of reasoning proposed to show why we should not preach the Gospel and persuade people to accept Jesus Christ as the one Saviour.

a) *All Religions are Equally Salvific*: One line of anti-mission reasoning goes like this: In the light of the effective will of God to save all human beings, we have to accept that the different religions are the means for it and that each religion contains divine revelation, and is salvific for its followers. So leave them alone, and do only social work and fight for justice.

It is true, as St. Peter told Cornelius of Caesarea, that God has no partiality, and that any one who sincerely seeks God will find salvation. That does not mean, however, that any religion by itself is salvific, by the element of truth it contains. Every blade of grass and every grain of sand and even the thief's cleverness in picking the pocket of another is a reflection of the Divine Being. But that does not make it salvific. It does not also mean that we have the right to deny followers of other religions the "news" about what God accomplished in Jesus for the sake of all humanity and the new order of salvation centred in the one Son of God become the Lord of human history. But the actual implication of the argument is that since there are today few takers for the religious message it is far easier to win friends and influence people through social work and social action, fighting alongside of people for their rights and taking their political leadership. Divide and rule is the old colonial policy. There is no doubt that any honest work of evangelization has to take into account the whole human person, attend to his material needs as well as the spiritual, and that the Gospel has to express clearly a preferential

option for the poor and condemn injustice in all its forms. The way Jesus Christ did it was first to give back to the poor, the hungry and the weeping their self-respect reminding them that they are the children of the Father in heaven. But to substitute Das Kapital for the Gospel is a specifically Western form of Christian heresy.

b) *Religions Should Coexist in Interdependence in the Secular Culture of India:* A second argument in the same line is that what unites all the people of India are not the religions which were always in conflict, but India's secularism. As part of our common history religions are interdependent. Hence in the context of our national culture the different religions have to coexist in dialogue, but without dialectics or mutual criticism or efforts at converting each other.

But this flies right in the face of the historical fact that our national culture was always a religious one, meeting even secular problems from the depth of the spirit. As Asoka stated in his rock edicts the only possible mode of existing together in the same country was to bear positive witness to one's religious tradition at the same time as honouring other faiths as dimensions of one's own. Reducing all religions to a mode of passive co-existence under the umbrella of one dominant secular culture was the outlook and approach of colonial rule right from the Pax Romana down to the hey-day of the British empire.

c) *Superiority of the Religion of the Atman over the Religion of the Historical Christ:* Domination is not the exclusive feature of colonialism. Even within the same nation one group or religion or culture may try to dislodge another or bring it under its control. This was true in India under the rule of the Buddhist emperors regarding other religions, and when Hindu rulers came to power Buddhism was virtually wiped out of the country. This passion for domination can be camouflaged as missionary zeal. Thus in Hinduism Advaita presented itself as religion par excellence by its ideal of the realization of one's identity with the one Atman, and every other form of faith and worship was shown to be inferior and to occupy only a subordinate position. This was also adopted by some Christian theologians. They tried to make Christianity intelligible to the Hindus by putting it within the Hindu frame of perception. They mistakenly took the humanity of Christ as a

human manifestation of the Logos, and hence only one among many like Krishna and Buddha. They thus denied the importance of the historical reality of the one Incarnation. Trying to show that the theandric reality of Christ was present as an unrecognized factor in Hinduism they ended up putting Hinduism into Christianity. Jesus Christ would thus be one expression of saguna brahman, and the Christian religion a subordinate form of Hinduism. Thus the religion of the Atman, even interpreted as the experience of the Spirit given by Jesus, was said to be superior to any devout following of the Jesus Christ of history, who could not be reached with certainty through mere historical means.

A Buddhist version of the same argument popularised by Ray Chand and Mahatma Gandhi and adopted by a number of our theologians is that all religions are the effort of blind men to define the elephant. So all of them are imperfect and contain only a partial truth. The only way open to them is to pool their experiences and form a super-religion.

But for human beings bound in history salvation has to come through history. It is not clear why an experience of reality viewed from the side of the One-alone-without-a-second, should be superior or more objective than a view from below from the underside of society and through the eyes of its victims. Besides, the Christian doctrine of Incarnation is not merely a manifestation of the divinity of the Logos through the human nature of Jesus, since that divinity is identical for Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the one and definitive entry of the person of the Son into human history as Jesus of Nazareth. There can be only one incarnation, and even if there were many they all would be one. Though religions are relative regarding their ultimate goal, the grasp of the divine economy of salvation, they are not relative to each other like the effort of blindmen to draw a composite picture of the elephant. Even to know that they are dealing with the same animal, someone with eyes has to guide them. The Son who came from the Father alone can be such a guide.

d) *Christianity is not Intelligible Outside the Christological Game:* There are some of our theologians who argue that imposing the Christ of the Gospels on people of other faiths as necessary for their salvation implies both theological and psychological contradictions. They are actually adopting the view of Hans



Frei and George Lindbeck who following the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein argue, that doctrines are communally binding rules of discourse especially regarding those beliefs and practices considered essential to the identity of the group. Like other games, Christianity as a game has to be defined by its own rules, namely monotheism, historical emphasis and Christological maximalism. Imposing them on other religionists like Hindus and Buddhists would be analogous to applying the rules of Basket Ball on the Football field.

Here again, the problem is the Western opposition between we and they, considering someone's religion as 'his' private concern, his faith and beliefs as his tradition, as opposed to and distinct from 'my' religion and 'my' tradition. One should not, however, forget that though there are distinctive rules for each game, there are also general rules governing all games as expressions of play. In the same way, all religions touch the basic concerns of existence common to all human beings. No religion says that its insights are exclusively for its members. Religions as distinct from cults, generally claim that their teachings are relevant to all the members of humanity. This is the basis of communication among religions of their practices and even beliefs. Generally religions are not contradictory of each other but emphasize different coordinates of human experience. Thus Hinduism stresses the need to experience God as more intimate to us than our own interior, Buddhism the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama regarding the emptiness of all material things, Islam the presence of God's Law in God's world, and Christianity the definitive entry of the Son of God into human history as Jesus of Nazareth.

e) *Theocentrism instead of Christocentrism*: Some Western scholars like John Hicks claimed to effect a Copernican revolution in interreligious dialogue by putting theocentrism in the place of Christocentrism as the starting point for considering different religions. If we start with Christ we are making him the yardstick for judging other religions and religious leaders putting them at a disadvantage, as earlier people looked at the universe with the earth as the centre. As Copernicus put the sun as the centre of observation of the universe, viewing all religions from their common basis of belief in God, one can see that Christianity is after all only one among many that made the universalist claims.

Here again the problem is the Procrustian goal of fitting all religions according to the measurements of the same conceptual bed. Except in philosophy books we cannot find a religion starting with an abstract idea of God. The Divine appears as the response to the actual needs and concerns of a people at a particular time, and hence the idea of God cherished by each religion is historically and culturally conditioned. It is through rational criticism and purification of ideas that one arrives at a more universal idea of the Deity. For Hebrews, Yahweh was a tribal god of heaven of a semi-nomadic people, showing them the way through the desert, and he was considered the universal Creator of heaven and earth only after their settlement in Palestine as an agricultural people. For Christians God is perceived as the Father of Jesus Christ: No one goes to the Father except through him. Infinite Deity cannot reveal itself through alien images, and the divine manifestations in creation, in theophanies, and interventions in history, only indirectly point towards God. It was in encounter with the sinless Jesus, crucified, dead and buried and risen from the dead, that people came to the realization: "This was really the Son of God!" For Christians theocentrism is possible only through Christocentrism. Hence evangelization is not the preaching of an abstract metaphysics. Like any other religious phenomenon it communicated an experience, the good "News", what the disciples saw with their eyes, heard with their ears and felt with their fingers about the Word of life (1 Jn. 1: 1-3).

### 3. The Lingering Western Traits of Our Theology

Today the greatest challenge for Christian missionary work in India is to get out of the strait-jacket of Western philosophy and its general outlook. Since the Spirit of God and the Risen Saviour are already present and active in every heart, we have to formulate our witness to Jesus in a manner as to respond to the searchings of the Indian mind. For this we have to carefully weed out good many Western elements of our theology which still keep it Western to all appearances.

a) *Sentimentality and Pessimism*: How distorted the image of Jesus we present to the Indian people is, is shown by the exaggerated emphasis on human sin, and the gruesome sufferings Jesus had to undergo on account of human sin, to placate an angry God. This conventional and sentimental approach to the

sufferings of Jesus does not make much of an impact on a people familiar with a long history of suffering. Such a view of the sufferings of Jesus is the product of the humanism of Europe of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which produced the presentday crucifix. Many Hindu converts to Christianity like Chakkarai and Chenchiah have testified that this emotional view of the Saviour under the image of a butchered dumb sheep is not very appealing to the Indian mind. The Bengali convert Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya became a Christian when he realized that Jesus was the real Guru, and he became a Catholic when he witnessed the Catholic celebration of Easter in contrast to the Protestant emphasis on Good Friday! Though it agrees with the doubt and groping of Western thought seen in the Greek tragedies, it contradicts the Indian faith in God, who is easily available to everyone in one's own heart as the source of peace and joy. It contradicts also the image of the passion of Jesus presented in the New Testament as a courageous and unflinching encounter with the Cross and death, finally crowned with the glorious resurrection. Our Cross is a dead wood that flowered. The Byzantine iconographers presented the crucified Saviour in golden vestments and with a kingly crown.

The Biblical view of human life is extremely optimistic, and the Jewish religion was one of joy. From the beginning our world is brooded over by the creative Spirit of God, and God dwells in the midst of his people. He really became Emmanuel and Lord of history when in the fullness of time the Son entered history as Jesus of Nazareth. The story of sin is presented in the Bible only as the background for the saving action of God who so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son for its sake, so that all who believed in him could attain the status of the children of God. As Chenchiah once stated, Christianity as a religion which focuses attention on laws, disobedience, sin, cross and propitiation and judgment misses the beauty and freshness of the Gospels. We have to stress love, resurrection, communion and sonship. The emphasis of Christ crucified is on the power of love which makes the cross ever radiant, sublime, spiritual symbol and hope of the suffering humanity.

b) *Greek Soteriology*: Adoption of Greek philosophy to explain the Christian vision of salvation made the Incarnation a divine effort merely to repair the damage caused by human sin.



All the related concepts like satisfaction, propitiation and expiation, directed to the offended majesty of God, and liberation, redemption and others implicitly referring to certain legal rights and dominion of satan over humanity, made the divine action contingent upon the vagaries of the finite world. What was forgotten in the process was the new order of the world established in the divine person of Jesus Christ. What is particularly appealing to the Indian religious outlook familiar with the Sakti that raises the dead is the new order brought about by the constitution of Jesus as the Son of God through the resurrection (Rom. 1: 4). The conquest of death and introduction of everlasting life was the spirit of the Vedic prayer: From unreality lead me to reality, from darkness lead me to light and from death lead me to immortality. Jesus' resurrection is not merely a happy ending imagined for an unjust tragedy, but rather the triumph of the spirit over the flesh, of a new order over the old, and a declaration of what the authentic condition of human beings should be.

c) *Clericalism*: Another disadvantageous burden we took over from the West was its clericalism. Though the laity, the laos, the People of God, is the real Church, and bishops, priests and deacons the servants for ministering to their salvation, down the centuries the clergy and the monks both in the Middle East and the West gained a sort of superior status over the ordinary baptized. Ever since the Protestant revolution which was principally a lay movement led by emperors and princes, there was a deep suspicion against the laity in the Western Church. The juridical code of 1917 institutionalized this inferiority of the laity. Pius XII characterised the clergy as the worthier members of the Mystical Body of Christ. While the clergy were defined as the active subjects of the sacred power of the Church, the laity had only a passive role of receiving from the clergy spiritual goods and helps necessary for salvation (Can. 682). Lay persons were forbidden to wear the ecclesiastical garb (Can. 683). The ecclesiology which tried to define the Church as a perfect society sharply divided its members into two groups, the clergy and the "non-clerics", the laity. The first group was the pastors and others the flock! The whole stress was on the juridical status. Though Vatican Council II and the new codes of Canon Law have done a great deal to reverse this situation and to restore to the People of God its legitimate place, practically very little has been changed in the mass of the laity which has been trained for centuries

with the firm conviction that their only rôle in the Church was to obey, pray and pay!

Mission is where we can make a beginning to form a new people with the new outlook. Vatican II in the *Lumen Gentium* 31 has given the fundamental principle that personhood in the Church is gained through baptism, by which people become one body with Christ, sharing in their own way the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. According to the Oriental Code c. 11: "In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function." Among the members there is only functional difference, since the ministerial priesthood is just the specific way the bishop, the priest and the deacon express Christ's one priesthood, as the laity exercise the same priesthood 'in their own patterns of activity to maintain the communion with the Church' They fulfil their duties which they owe to the universal Church and to their own Church sui juris, live a holy life and promote the growth of the Church and "endeavour so that the divine message of salvation may increasingly reach all peoples in every age and in every land" (CCEO 12-14).

Even with regard to functions Vatican II modified the notion of office as "any function which has been permanently assigned and is to be exercised for a spiritual purpose" thus enabling lay people to be entrusted with some ecclesiastical offices, with a view to a spiritual end, provided they did not require the special charism of sacred order. Though the last basis of sacred power is sacramental, the immediate source of jurisdictional aspect is not solely the sacrament of order, and in certain circumstances lay persons can possess and exercise this sacred power. A lay person may be appointed a judge on a collegial tribunal, though the rôle of the judge is an ecclesiastical office to which power of jurisdiction is attached (CCEO 1086/4; 1087/2). Besides, ecclesiastical office holders can delegate their functions which do not require sacred orders to lay people, since delegated power does not need any office (LC. 131/1). Besides, the laity can be empowered "to participate in the exercise of the power of governance in accordance with the norm of law" (CCEO 979/2). Pastoral councils both at the diocesan and parish levels actively share in the mission and ministry of the Church.

Pope Paul VI through his apostolic letter dated 15th August 1972 suppressing all the minor orders and subdiaconate, started in the Latin Church the "installed ministries" of Lector and Acolyte to which laymen could be stably installed. Lay people both men and women can be ministers of communion. If we look at the banquet aspect of the Eucharist it is quite natural and more appropriate that participants at the table of the Lord be also ministers of communion rather than non-participant clerics coming in just for distributing the Eucharist. The laity have an active role in the ministry of the sacraments. Thus with regard to baptism when a priest is not available "in case of necessity" it can be administered by a deacon or another cleric or a religious or "by any other Christian faithful" (CCEO 677). Though marriage is not a mere contract but a sacred rite and needs the presence of a priest to confer the blessing, the fact that the couple themselves are the ministers is given expression in the special provision that the couple can celebrate a true marriage validly and licitly before witnesses alone if they cannot have access to a priest without grave inconvenience, not only in danger of death but also if the situation is to last more than a month (CCEO 832).

Competent lay people can be financial administrators (LC. 494) and members of the financial committee (LC. 492), and hold other administrative offices like that of the diocesan chancellor, vice-chancellor (LC. 482/1-2) and notary (LC. 483/1). Besides holding several offices connected with the marriage tribunal like those of assessor (CCEO 1089) auditor, ponens and relator, promoter of justice and defender of the bond (CCEO 1096), lay persons can be assigned cases which do not involve properly tribunal function such as cases of lack of canonical form, cases of presumed death and remarriage (LC. 1707) and Pauline privilege cases (LC. 1143-50). What is important is that lay people be properly trained and empowered to bear full witness to their faith and take an active role in building up the body of the Church. In the presentday world of secularism lay theologians can provide more credible witness than the clergy who are taken for granted as functionaries of the institutional religion.

d) *Pneumatology*: An important area of theology in which we Indians have been shortchanged by the West is pneumatology. It is true that now-a-days we have imported from the West the



charismatic movement and pentecostalism which insist on baptism by the Spirit and all the extraordinary phenomena connected with it. But this noisy superficial approach to the spirit which appeals to the masses, is rather looked down upon by the spiritual Masters of all religions as an addiction to the material benefits of the Spirit than to Spirit itself. The hallmark of the Indian spirit is *ekagrata*, one-pointedness. All the energies of will, mind, power and longing have to be brought into focus into a single constant flame. The injunction of the Bible is: love your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. In India there is a new conception of prayer. It is silent. The injunction is cease wagging your tongue and start straining your ears. Kill your mind and let the Lord within speak. In everyone there is a potentiality for the enlargement of the inner spiritual flame through intense spiritual effort.

There is no doubt that today in Western theology there is an increased importance given to the Spirit. But the problem is with the approach itself. Since in the Latin conception of Trinity first comes the one divine essence in which the three persons subsist, the emphasis is on the one action of the divinity, in all that happens. Christ gave the Spirit to the Church, and in the power of the Spirit the Church, the one expression of the divine salvific action, went on to emerge as Christendom, embracing both the spiritual and temporal worlds. Expansion is the one concern of its outlook on the world. It looks as though the Church is exercising a sort of monopoly over the Spirit and only grudgingly does it recognize the working of the Spirit outside its structures. Eastern conception of the Trinity, on the other hand, places the emphasis on persons, each of whom has the whole divinity, and each of whom is a point of personal encounter. So Eastern spirituality in its encounter with the Father, from whom all paternity in heaven and earth takes its name, sees the Word and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father. This dual divine personal action is first seen in the human soul of Christ, since it receives a stamp of the divine personality in its very being from the Logos and a stamp of holiness in its essence from the Spirit.

The scope of mission work is to see that what happened in the human soul of Jesus should be extended to every human being. Actually the Spirit and the Risen Christ who has become

a spirit, are already present in every individual to whom we address the Gospel. Hence the role of the Church is specifically to provide flesh, shape and a human face to the divine persons speaking within the heart of the human being searching for God. This actually corresponds to the two poles of religious experience, recognized in almost all traditions, the inner pole of the voice of God within, and the outer theandric pole of the incarnation, avatar, prophet or guru. The uniqueness of the Christian message is not in denying this natural dynamic of conversion, but in providing guarantee for its human genuineness and divine authenticity.

#### 4. Evangelization in Collaboration with Other Faiths

The Achilles heel of the work of evangelization in India is the longstanding debate among missionaries whether conversion should be a death to one's religious background, relinquishing membership in the old religion and gaining membership in the Church, or a smooth transition from one's earlier religious faith to a better realization of the same in Jesus Christ. The root of the whole confusion was opposing Jesus of Christians to the Siddhartha of the Buddhists, Krishna of the Hindus and the like, creating a we-they opposition. But this actually goes against the fundamental supposition of Christian faith that all humanity is one family with one history and one destiny. There is only one economy of salvation for all God's children. There is not one God for the Hindus and another for the Muslims. We are all one people; only some of us happened to be Hindus, some Muslims and some Christians, and a sizeable section without any God or faith, often by no fault of theirs. The starting point for all believers is the divine gift of faith, which cannot be merited by human efforts. Hence all religions are trying to express and explain that basic gift of faith according to one or other coordinate of human existence.

Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and Confucius are all the common heritage of all believers marking different orientations of the same basic faith experience. Confucian emphasis on the authenticity and propriety of the human nature balanced between tradition of the ancients and mandate of heaven, Mohammed's appeal to the living Law of Allah, Buddha's illumination regarding the emptiness of all material things, and Jesus' 'Abba experience', are all dimensions of the same gift of faith. Even the incarnation is not a happening or change in the divinity which is immutable, but something radically affecting

man. The union of the human nature of Christ with the person of the Son is not a change in the Logos, but a change at the creature's end, the event of Jesus' humanity having its being and total orientation in identity with the person of the Word towards the Father.

The various dimensions, emphasized by different religions, as far as they are not contradictory, are open to all believers. All who honestly seek God will find him. Of course we cannot but deny that certain religious systems are inadequate and some of them even contradictory. There are people who take the good God for granted and only care about placating malevolent forces. Some postpone their salvation indefinitely to the future. Some others try to bribe the saints to protect themselves against God. Where there is error or distortion it has to be criticized and corrected. But this is needed not only with regard to followers of one or other religion. All believers need constant self-criticism regarding their grasp of faith, and they have to extend the service of criticism also to their partners in interreligious dialogue.

Evangelization is not primarily an effort to snatch people out of hell. It is an invitation to all believers to recognize the new spiritual reality made available to them in Jesus Christ. They have to go beyond the condition of remaining mere obedient servants of God, or acknowledging the ontic unity of all finite things in the One-alone-without-a-second to a recognition of their own individual personalities as children of the one Father in heaven. It is a call to sanctity and extraordinary friendship with the personal Triune God, and to apostleship to communicate this new order of salvation to all fellow human beings. Both Buddhism and Jainism started as religions of monks, persons who committed themselves to an extraordinary life of renunciation and holiness. In early Christianity, Baptism was a special call to be closely united to the Only begotten Son of God. Christians were so called because they were recognized as the body of the Disciples of Christ. In the modern world of religious pluralism this should be the main thrust of evangelization. In our land of intense religiosity only a call to exceptional holiness can make an impact on people.

## 5. The New Evangelization

In this perspective the call to "New Evangelization" given by Pope John Paul II provides a special challenge. From the very beginning of his pontificate he was calling for a new evangelization,



and as he often stated it was not merely for a re-evangelization of those who had lost their faith. The point of departure for this new evangelization is the call of the crucified Christ present in the depth of suffering of his present-day members, the exploited workers, the marginalised, the godless and the big mass of people in every religion who have lost faith in organized religion. One can take for example the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. A section of them were true believers who prayed with their rabbis and died with them. But all know that the big majority of them went to the gas chambers in Godless despair. Who can say that they all went to eternal damnation, and that the Spirit of God was not invisibly active in them during the darkest moments of their lives? Who can say a well educated and well-fed theologian's response to the mysterious gift of faith is more authentic and more salvific than that of the atheist whose unbelief is no fault of his but mostly the result of the circumstances of his life? The quality and merit of one's faith-response are not decided by one's education, talents, and position in life, which are only the capital investments. It depends more on how one's naked self is related to God, with the help of and even in spite of one's endowments. Any authentic building up of the body of the Risen Lord has to start with a recognition that what we find in this mass of humanity without faith and hope is the continuing agony of Gethsemani and the Cross of the Son of God in his members.

Pope John Paul II reminds us that the new evangelization is not a new gospel that will arise from ourselves, from our culture and our analyses about the needs of man. That would not be a gospel but a human invention. The new evangelization consists in recalling from the Gospel all that look difficult to assimilate for the modern mentality. It is not the Gospel filtered through the culture, but Jesus Christ mediated by the whole culture. The starting point of the new evangelization is that Jesus Christ has inscrutable richness (Eph. 3: 8), which does not reject any culture or human condition. The novelty does not affect the content of the Gospel message. But in the light of the Biblical movement and the various forms of historical criticism one has to take a new look at the original meaning of the Gospel message. As Vatican II (DV n. 12) points out there is a unity of the whole Scripture and the living tradition of the whole Church and the analogy of faith which puts the different mysteries into a single perspective.

The great challenge of evangelization today is how from the human context of our villages, the poverty, social and political disabilities of our people we make all people reflect on the contribution Jesus and his Gospel can make. Still our theological discourse appears a mere monologue directed to the inner politics of the Church. We are still stuck in the Western preconceptions. There is no possibility of any progress in the work of evangelization, unless we extricate ourselves from the Western problematic and enter into earnest dialogue with our fellow countrymen, and their actual concerns. The houses, in which our missionaries stay, have to be in the heart of the village rather than outstations from which they make visits to the people as foreigners to their culture and life-style.

Secondly effective mission work demands a positive approach to the many kinds of pluralism we encounter in the modern world. There is religious pluralism, which shows that we have to take seriously the Indian religions and their scriptures and traditions. Only from a deep grasp and sharing of their authentic religious experience at its best may we invite them to share our religious experience. The ecumenical courtesy now being extended to the various Christian denominations should be shown also to major world-religions. Remaining faithful to our tradition and stating it clearly without ambiguity, we have to show respect to other peoples' convictions and show a willingness to work with them for the good of all people.

Thirdly we have to enter into the spirit of the Liturgical Movement so that we can encourage people who come to Christ from other faiths make their own specific contribution to celebrate his riches. You appreciate only what you can contribute to; what is gratis received is not appreciated. Of course, fidelity to the past of our ecclesial tradition is essential for maintaining its identity. But fidelity should not be slavery to the past. Unless we allow the three Catholic rites to receive spontaneously new elements from the culture of the people they serve they will stagnate and die. If liturgy is really celebration of the mystery of Christ in the life of the people, it should not be reading from a book, but should allow scope for new expressions, and this should be particularly regarding the most charismatic of the members, namely the president of the liturgical assembly. Today we are trying to build up Christ's

body in a fragmented world, in which often there is little actual communication among the fragments. Here it is the Risen Body of Christ that gives us the confidence that speaking and working together we can generate common values. Today's radical pluralism is a brilliant irony against the ideal of the Great Society which was the illusion of the Enlightenment. It led to various kinds of totalitarianism and to totally programmed societies. In fact there is no society as such, but only people living together, interacting and creating their own networks of meaning.

Fourthly the Gospel we preach should shed the outmoded traditional interpretations, get to the root of the original message of Christ, make clear its unity with the living tradition of all the Churches and also the integral unity of all the mysteries of faith. In our world people have lost their faith in the institution, which often instrumentalizes relations, and a growing individualism is giving exaggerated emphasis to the rights of the person to the detriment of his more necessary collective obligations. So the Christian Gospel has to show new forms of solidarity and new images of the social bond. Church cannot exist in a socio-cultural vacuum but living in the world and for the world it should work towards the total transformation of our world.

Fifthly there is need to bring out the fundamental unity that exists among all religions particularly in the field of morals and cultic celebration, in order to make clear what specific contribution Christian faith can make to render faith more intelligible. Uniqueness is not showing something which nobody else has but rather indicating how something which everyone has may be better expressed. Only with a firm conviction that the entire religious history of humanity, all the religious leaders and their teachings and their Scriptures are the common heritage of all human beings may we work together to arrive at the fullness of truth and salvation and make it available to all God's children. There is no question of superiority or inferiority here, but only a common search. In a society that does not agree even on fundamental moral principles or even the nature of the bonum, we have to start with a procedural ethics that recognizes the dignity of the human person, an ethics of governance that respects the recognized procedural values, protects the freedom of expression, the equality of men and women, and the



right of individuals to co-responsibility. Unfortunately this procedural ethics is often lacking in the Church, which should proclaim it as the foundation of its Gospel.

Finally the bedrock of our work of evangelization should be the authentic human experience of the people, their needs and concerns. It is where the Spirit of God is actually present and fashioning the body of the Risen Lord. There is no doubt that a poor country like India can use all the financial help it can secure from abroad. But, only projects which a people conscious and proud of their traditions can plan, undertake and carry out under their own responsibility will make a mission grow. The goal of the work of evangelization is to change the Indian people from a status of mere consumers to effective contributors to the world both on the spiritual and material planes.

C. M. I. Dharmaniketan  
Behala, Calcutta — 700 034

John B. Chethimattam

# Christian Encounter with Igbo Traditional Religion

## Models for Interpreting Religious Change in Igboland, Nigeria

This paper examines the different theoretical models for interpreting socio-religious change, especially the two paradigms, endogenism and exogenism. The first model attributes change to powers within the subject, the second to extraneous factors. The second model adequately interprets religious change in Igbo land; the factors that brought about the change are largely Christianity and Western education the effects of which have been more revolutionary than that of any other factor.

### Introduction

From the second half of the 19th Century and rapidly gaining momentum towards the middle of the 20th century, tremendous radical changes have been taking place in Igbo traditional society. The changes affect the whole of existence of Igbo life and make their indelible imprint upon the religious, economic, political and social lives of the Igbo. Commenting on the 'wind' of social change blowing over Africa, J. S. Mbiti rightly commented:

Africa is caught up in a world of revolution which is so dynamic that it has almost got out of human control ... The man of Africa must get up and dance for better or for worse on the arena of world drama. His image of himself and of the universe is disrupted and must make room for the changing 'universal' and not simply 'tribal' man.<sup>1</sup>

The revolution which J. S. Mbiti described above tremendously affected Igbo traditional society and led to the disintegration of the structures of the traditional society which sustained the traditional religion with all its elaborate rituals. The monolithic position which the traditional religion had hitherto enjoyed before

---

1. J. S. Mbiti: *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann 1969) p. 216.

the "wind" of change blew over Igboland has been broken. As a result of the contact of Igbo Traditional Religion with Christianity and Islam, ritual practices involving the vertical relationship of the Igbo with the supernatural have been weakened. The two migrant religions in Igboland — Christianity and Islam — have continued to take tremendous toll on Igbo Traditional Religion.

Some historians give an exaggerated view of the christianization of Igboland. For instance E. A. Ayandele in his article entitled, "The Collapse of 'Pagandom' in Igboland" claimed that the walls of 'pagandom' collapsed Jerichowise.<sup>2</sup> This gives the impression that Igbo Traditional Religion collapsed totally as a result of the christianization of Igboland. Many missionary hagiographers, travellers and colonial administrators claimed that the defeat of Igbo Traditional Religion by Christianity was a rout. Christianity has not yet eliminated Igbo Traditional Religion and in fact its end is not yet in sight. The conversion of many traditionalists to the "Religions of the Book" operating in Igboland has led to a situation in which the Igbo gods are said to be in retreat. They occasionally reappear.<sup>3</sup>

There has been paucity of models for interpreting religious change in Igboland. Do we interpret religious change in Igboland only in terms of Christian encounter with Igbo Traditional Religion? This paper will focus on the disparate models for interpreting religious change in Igboland.

### Models of Socio-Religious Change

Sociologists attach much importance to the phenomenon of social change which has been described endogenously as a difference of the pattern of events over time, it is the replacement (in part or whole) of one such pattern by another within the same area or unit.<sup>4</sup> Thus, according to Ekong, change is an alteration or marked deviation from that which existed before.<sup>5</sup> In pursuance

2. E. A. Ayandele: "The Collapse of Pagandom in Igboland", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (Review Article), Vol. vii, No. 1 (Dec. 1975), pp. 125-140.

3. Many of the Igbo who claim Christianity as their religion still retain much of their traditional beliefs.

4. Anthony D. Smith: *The Concept of Social Change* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 15 & 152.

5. Ekong E. Ekong: *Sociology of the Ibibio* (Calabar: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 107.



of their ambition to provide a theory of social change, social theorists have postulated disparate theories. The different theories may be classified under two paradigms of social change: the endogenous and the exogenous.<sup>6</sup>

(i) *Endogenous Paradigm of Social Change*

Endogenism as a model of social change is based on the evolutionist theory that change is endogenous, that is, it is inherent in the unit undergoing change. Evolutionists argue that society contains within itself, like a plant, all its possibilities at its inception. Change is therefore a process of realising the social potentialities of a given unit, and arises out of the very nature of that very unit, requiring little help from outside.<sup>7</sup> Endogenism is the core of evolution.

Evolutionists have an organic conception of society and assume that existing cultures evolve gradually from a 'lower' to a higher one. There is an embedded idea of unilinear development from a backward to a more progressive or modern culture. An evolutionist sees progress as an attribute of a cultural system. To the evolutionist, change is predominantly an internal growth resulting from the untampered, uninterrupted process of social change.<sup>8</sup>

Although the evolutionist theorists claim that change is endogenous, they are not oblivious of external (exogenous) factors in stimulating change. The very biological analogy from which they draw such nourishment gives evidence of the vital role of the environment — of the sun, water, food and air. The biological analogy shows that

Societies too need the appropriate physical and social environment. They too require stimulus of foreign ideas and contacts, of wars, new blood, exploration and trade. It is these external events which 'disturb' the smooth cumulation of a dynamic equilibrium and set in train a new cycle of evolutionary change.<sup>9</sup>

---

6. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, pp. 50ff.

7. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, pp. 27–28.

8. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, p. 37. See also O. U. Kalu (ed), *Readings in African Humanities: African Cultural Development* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1982), p. 13.

9. Anthony D. Smith. 1973, p. 149.

According to this analogy, evolutionary change derives the momentum to unfold itself from the external factors, which are regarded as mere stimuli. The theoretical interest of the endogenous model of social change is centered upon the image of a society as an unfolding of inherent potentialities.<sup>10</sup>

The religious model which is implied in Frazer's unilinear evolutionary theory is that as small scale, primitive societies evolve towards the higher position occupied by nineteenth century Europe, their religious mentality and organisation would become more complex. This only occurs by the displacement of the traditional by an external change agent, western civilization.<sup>11</sup>

But Emile Durkheim, a functionalist theorist would sneer at the interpretation that social change could be catalyzed by an external change agent. Like the evolutionists, Durkheim has an organic conception of society. He, therefore, opines that religion is a social evolution. As society evolves, her clan cults change because religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices by which individuals represent to themselves the society to which they belong and their relation to it.<sup>12</sup>

According to O. U. Kalu, Durkheim's insights demonstrated that though religion starts as a dependent variable, a creation of the society, it evolves to become an independent variable which can catalyze change. Based on Durkheim's theoretical stand, his disciples emphasized the function of religion as a store-house of value integrative force and legitimizer of social foundations. Religious structures and values are therefore not static, but evolve with society, changing other aspects of culture and being changed in the process.<sup>13</sup>

Social theorists such as the symbolists, who assume that African spirits are symbolic representations of reality and intellectualists, who regard the spirits and the whole African cosmology as theoretical framework, agree that conversion from African Traditional Religion to "world religions" was a direct response to changes

---

10. Anthony D. Smith. 1973. p. 151.

11. O. U. Kalu: "The Gods in Retreat: Models for Interpreting Religious Change in Africa", Emefie Ikenga Metuh (ed.), *The Gods in Retreat: Continuity and Change in African Religion* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985, pp. 3-4.

12. Quoted in O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. 4.

13. O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. 4.

in social organisation of African societies. Robin Horton who advocates the intellectualist approach to social change argued that conversion occurred when rapid social change blotted out the traditional religious systems around which the traditional religious cults were built. He noted:

If thousands of people found themselves and if even those left inside see the boundaries weakening if not actually dissolving they can only interpret these changes by assuming that the lesser spirits (underpinners of the microcosm) are in retreat.<sup>14</sup>

According to Horton, the idea of a *deus remotus* was latent in the African cosmology. When the structure of the traditional African societies and, consequently, traditional religious systems associated with them collapsed under the impact of social change, the Supreme Being, who has been latent in the traditional cosmology (microcosm) came down to be the underpinner in the macrocosm. Horton's intellectualist approach has been criticized because it failed to account for the pattern of change among those African countries where God was not hiding pairing his finger nails.<sup>15</sup>

Robin Horton explains religious change in Africa endogenously in terms of social change in traditional African societies. He argues that religious change was caused by endogenous factor rather than exogenous factor. He explained further that the traditional African cosmology had the potential of a Supreme Being to cater for the macrocosm brought about by the socio-structural change.

Horton's intellectualist approach has been commended firstly for assuming that there is a degree of rationality in African traditional cosmology which can be compared to western scientific thinking. Secondly, his approach dismantles Levy Strauss's distinction between mythical thinking among the primitives and rational thinking in science. This, at least, dismisses the racist bias that African beliefs are mere aggregations of irrational reactions to natural phenomena and environment. Although Horton does not regard African thinking as scientific, he opines that both Africans and Westerners start from a theoretical framework which they can correlate with empirical situations.<sup>16</sup>

---

14. Robin Horton: "African Conversion", *Africa*, XLI, 1971, p. 102. ~ See also O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. xi.

15. O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. 5.

16. O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. 6.



Trimingham also is of the view that religious change in Africa was consequent upon socio-structural changes which questioned the validity of the whole of African culture. His view is clear on the question whether a culture designed to serve the needs of microcosm, ethnic, rural, agricultural or pastoral communities be valid for macrocosmic cosmopolitan, urban, industrial countries. With regard to traditional religion Trimingham says:

The indigenous religions, being primarily local and ethnic have no future in their organised forms and the religious future of the Africans today lies between Christianity and Islam on the one hand, and secularism on the other. His choice is between religions which lay claim to universality whether positive or negative in their approach to their life values.<sup>17</sup>

On his own part, Ifeka-Moller attributes conversion from African Traditional Religion to "world religions" to the sense of deprivation and disillusionment which resulted from unfulfilled expectation from acceptance of social change.<sup>18</sup> According to him, many Africans being deprived of political and socio-economic powers accepted the new religions which they saw as alternative sources of power.

Karl Marx's economic theory falls within the endogenous pattern of social change. Karl Marx was a prominent 19th century social theorist. He was deeply concerned with the problem of social change. He commented that religion was one of the obstacles to change. He declared:

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness.<sup>19</sup>

To Karl Marx, man created his gods and therefore religion becomes the product of man's effort which is determined by his social existence. Marx maintained that the real force of change is man's action in shaping the world. He contended that

---

17. Emefia Ikenga Metuh: "African Traditional Religion and the Challenges of the Renaissance of African Culture", *Bulletin of African Religion and Culture*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1987, pp. 11-12.

18. Emefia Ikenga Metuh: 1985, p. xi.

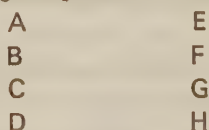
19. Quoted in O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. 6,

The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual process of life.<sup>20</sup>

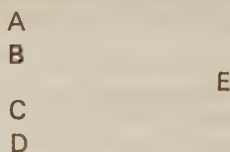
Marx rejected the idea that religion could be an independent variable capable of catalyzing change. He argued that morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and corresponding forms of consciousness thus no longer retain any semblance of independence. They have no history, no development, but men developing their material production and their material intercourse alter along with this, their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life.<sup>21</sup>

The model of religious change which is found in Karl Marx's materialist critique is that religious change is determined by the mode of production. Following Karl Marx's insights, African Traditional Religion will be displaced in the same proportion as the rate of change in economic mode. The religious practices of primitive, agricultural, pastoral/nomadic communities differ from those of industrial communities. Karl Marx concludes in respect of change that religious change is a function of social change.

The usefulness of explaining religious change in relation to social change or vice-versa is limited. Some theories which explain that social change catalyzes religious change or vice-versa have a problem of establishing direct causality amidst many variables. The following diagrams of causal relationship illustrate this point.



The effect of A is unambiguously E; in the same way the effects of E—F; C—G; D—H. But suppose, on the other hand, a theory recognizes many variables. In the following diagram of causal connection,



20. O. U. Kalu, 1985. p. 6.

21. O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. 7.

E cannot be ambiguously ascribed to either A, B, C or D.<sup>22</sup>

(ii) *The Exogenous Model of Socio-Religious Change*

Exogenous paradigm of change attributes change to external events. Just as endogenism is the core of evolution, an exogenous model of change is implicit within the enterprise of history, a record of specific events. Empirically, the impact and frequency of the external event in history has been significant in socio-religious change. To interpret religious change in Africa without reference to such external events as the birth of Christianity and Islam is to miss the point. Anthony Smith argues that since historical societies occupy a space in time and location, it is unrealistic to imagine that any of their main properties escapes external influence and as events are patterned in space and time, they have an impact upon their surroundings.<sup>23</sup> External events are, therefore, powerful agents of socio-religious change. They intrude from outside and impinge upon that which comes into contact with them. The exogenous theory of change provides a viable framework for the study of socio-religious and historical transformation generally.

The first element associated with an exogenous model of change is diffusionism, a term which is applied to early twentieth century research in cultural anthropology which criticized the evolutionist schemes for their failure to take into account the various cultural borrowings which are to be found in every civilization. Cultural anthropologists argue that because of the continued traffic in ideas, techniques and personnel, cultures are composite and contain layers of varying period and provenance.<sup>24</sup>

Diffusion was not only identified with cultural anthropology, it also became a dominant trend in other disciplines such as archaeology, history and sociology. In archaeology, for example, Elliot Smith, Perry and Regland proposed a hyper-diffusionism which explained the rise of civilizations as the products of the missionary activities of an elite group emanating from Egypt or Sumer.<sup>25</sup> In history, diffusionism has a more profound control. It is difficult to cite a historian who has not written under the influence of diffusionism even though they might have not subscribed openly to the

22. O. U. Kalu, 1985, p. 9.

23. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, p. 161.

24. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, p. 157.

25. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, p. 157.



diffusionist theory. Diffusionists believe that change in any unit is exogenous; the source of change is to be located outside the phenomenon whose transformation is being analysed.

### Typology of Diffusion

#### (i) *Migration*

This consists in the movement of people from one place to another to live there. It may also refer to regular travelling of people from one region to another. Migration leads to diffusion of socio-religious ideas.

#### (ii) *Missionary Activities*

This kind of diffusion is typified by the activities of Overseas missionaries in Africa. This more than any other exogenous factor gave rise to tremendous religious change in Africa in general and Igboland in particular from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century.

#### (iii) *Invasionism including Conquest and Extermination*

Along with invasion, the process of conquest has been commonly associated with the diffusionist model. Conquest may lead to the fusion of patterns of events into a new synthetic pattern; but migration, colonisation, slave trading as well as economic and ideological changes, may impel groups and cultures to experience amalgamation and even fusion over time.<sup>26</sup> The British imperialists invaded and conquered Igboland between 1900 and 1910.<sup>27</sup> The invasion and conquest prepared the ground for the planting of Christianity in Igboland.

#### (iv) *Trade and Technological Exchange*

The establishment of commercial relations between cities or countries leads to the spread of new ideas. After the invasion and conquest of Igboland by the British imperialists, trade flowed between Igboland and Britain. From Igboland the British merchants bought palm oil and kernal while the Igbo imported manufactured goods from Britain. Britain exported some of her technology to Igboland. Some of the British merchants used the opportunity offered by their trade with the Igbo to "sell" their religious ideas to the Igbo. The movement of men and of ideas and/or techniques leads to diffusion.

26. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, p. 164.

27. F. K. Ekechi: *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry 1857-1914* (London: Frank Cass 1971), pp. 114 and 127.

The second element associated with exogenism is the intrusion of events. History is made up of patterns of events which comprise the various 'histories' which historians chart — history of various peoples, classes and states, institutions and sectors (cultural, technological, economic, political, religious etc.) — into which any concrete unit may be analytically divided.

The exogenists opine that socio-religious change can only be analysed in relation to the influence which these histories exert upon each other and not in terms of some inner workings of development of a particular unit taken in isolation. In other words, a given pattern of events must be analysed as the product of another pattern which originates outside itself and intrudes upon it. Some examples of such intrusions are wars, colonization, diplomatic relations, and so on.<sup>28</sup> It must be noted that all socio-religious change is the product of an intrusion of external events.

The third element in the exogenous paradigm of change is crisis. In any exogenous model of change, the three way interactive process between unit, neighbours and environment is not always smooth or regular. It is usually characterised by tension. In historical records, crisis usually accompanies transformations. It signals imminent change. In this regard Anthony Smith observes that

To break recurrent patterns of events requires the confluence of a number of causal chains of patterns possessing a 'force' superior to that of the entrenched pattern. So that transformations exhibit all these symptoms of disturbance, upheaval, social movement, and the overthrow of ancient institutions and beliefs which we may subsume under the term crisis which the functionalists designate as disequilibrium.<sup>29</sup>

Exogenists regard crisis as a frequent and 'normal' part of social life, alongside periods of persistence. Crisis and stability form the two sides of the history of any unit because the tendency for one pattern of events to establish itself is often subject to the challenge of other external patterns. For instance, Igbo Traditional Religion met with some crisis as a challenge from Christianity, external pattern of religion.

28. Anthony D. Smith, 1973, p. 161.

29. Anthony D. Smith, p. 162.

The exogenous model of change is a more suitable theory for the interpretation of religious change in Igboland. The exogenous factor, no doubt, played a major role in the religious transformation of Igboland.

### Conclusion

This paper has examined the different theoretical models for interpreting socio-religious change. The two paradigms of socio-religious change — endogenism and exogenism — have been fully analysed. The model which adequately interprets religious change in Igboland is exogenism. Religious change in Igboland was largely due to Christianity and western education, exogenous factors. The effects of Christianity and western education have been more revolutionary than other exogenous factors, although the two were for most part inseparably linked.

As C. I. Ejizu observed, the arrival in Igboland of Christianity meant the introduction into the relatively stable traditional religious framework of an alternative view of the world, a rival cosmology, and a different way of understanding the place of human in the universe.<sup>30</sup> The early C. M. S. missionaries who came to Igboland were liberated African slaves who had imbibed western culture and the 'new religion'. Their dominant ambition in Igboland was a total christianization of the Igbo. They pursued this single missionary ambition with vigour.

Dept. of Religious Studies  
University of Uyo  
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Felix N. Nwahaghi

---

30. C. I. Ejizu: "Continuity and Discontinuity in Igbo Traditional Religion", Emefia Ikenga Metuh (ed.), *The Gods in Retreat*, 1985, p. 145.



# A Unique Experiment in Missionary Work

Bishop Januarius the founder of the Chanda Mission and its first Bishop had an inter-religious vision of the work of evangelization. For him it was seeking the truth with all people of good will. The boarding houses he built close to the mission churches accommodated young people of all faiths. His seven-point programme for building up the community was in its general scope acceptable also to Hindus and Muslims. His motto was "from the periphery to the centre".

## Evangelization in Chanda

The mission in Chanda was launched in 1962 in a multi-religious context. Bishop Januarius and his team of missionaries were neither trained for missionary work nor had they any command of local languages Marathi, Telugu and Hindi. The only asset he and his missionaries had was a heart full of love for the church and a single minded determination to have the gospel values as the leaven in the integral development of the society. The goal before Bishop Januarius was definite and clear.

"Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as reflection of that truth which enlightens all men, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is 'the way, and the truth and the life...' The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not hereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people" (RM 55)<sup>1</sup>.

Bishop Januarius was fully convinced that the Holy See had entrusted this mission territory to his stewardship with the unique intention of evangelization. He never deviated from this ideal and goal. He was consistent with his vision. He would not yield to

---

1. Redemptoris Missio: John Paul II, 91.

any influence or pressure or attraction of huge projects which would jeopardize the primary motive of evangelization. He had clear and definite priorities of values, and he inspired and guided his co-workers also in the same vision till the end of his tenure.

### **Liberation for all**

Bishop Januarius, a spirit-filled leader never limited the works of his missionaries to a particular section or group of people. He thought that the Church personnel must not be limited to Christians alone but open to all people irrespective of castes and creeds so that might benefit from the basic vision of liberation for all. Following the footsteps of Blessed Chavara, Bishop Januarius visualized education for all classes of people. Schools in the local mediums and also in English medium give quality education to all deserving students irrespective of caste or religion.

### **Future Church nurtured in Boarding Houses**

Unlike other Indian mission dioceses Bishop Januarius visualized the shape of the future church in Chanda. Experiments coupled with convictions led to the starting of boarding houses all over the diocese of Chanda. Chanda a virgin land for Christianity was not any way conducive to the young converts to grow in a Christian background. Their faith had to be instilled and deepened. They had to be constantly instructed. Their tilt towards the traditional superstitions had to be replaced with strong and deeper foundations of faith in Christianity. The new converts to Christianity who were mostly the rural flock had no clear vision or idea about their religion or faith. The newly introduced Christianity indeed needs time to take root in the core of the hearts of the adult converts.

The boarding houses provided a Christian background for the children. Most of the boarding houses are managed by priests and sisters and they provide atmosphere congenial to the expression and practice of Christian faith. Besides daily Holy Mass and regular catechism the boarders grow deep in Christian faith through the practice of sacraments and sacramentals. The parents of the students get frequent chances to visit their wards and to be further strengthened in faith through regular contacts with the mission centres. The children who are instructed and educated in the boarding houses in turn go back to their villages and spread the good news during their holidays. Those who are educated in such houses become a source of faith as they initiate and take interest

in the daily prayers and other Christian practices. As a result the whole village is filled with a Christian atmosphere even if the missionaries are unable to make frequent visits to the interior of the villages.

The selection of students to the boardinghouses is not exclusively for the converted. Often the boarding children also include non-Christians. At the same time they too grow in a Christian atmosphere which often paves the way to conversion to Christianity. The children who are in the boardinghouses in many cases, would not have otherwise a chance of education. Cow boys and girls also get a chance of education through the boardinghouses.

Children so educated with the Christian training, formation and practice become mature enough to lead a life of faith in Christ. Hence as it was visualized the newly constituted families who have been brought up in the boardinghouses are making better Christian families. Even the non-baptized boarders are imbued with better values and morals as they leave their boardinghouses. Thirty-three years old Christianity in Chanda also has quite a good number of vocations to priesthood and religious life.

### Shape of Challenges today

The challenges today have brought about vast changes compared to the past. Christianity which is getting deep rooted in Chanda is also not left unchallenged. The challenges are two fold: Those from outside Christianity and those within the existing christian flock. Fundamentalist forces which are making strenuous efforts through their anti-christian propaganda and activities have been always there, but at the same time they are more active than ever today especially in the BJP ruled Maharashtra. Challenges within the new community are multifarious. Evangelization had been done always together with developmental and social works. When the thrust is gradually shifted from spoon feeding to solid food, attitudes of challenging, threatening and questioning have developed. Extension works and expansion of area are unwelcome for certain groups. Food for work and other similar programmes have been completely stopped in Chanda since a decade. As the community grows both academically and economically the emphasis is gradually being given on deepening and flourishing the faith. Challenges related to this go hand in hand at present.



### The Seven Point Program

Bishop Januarius introduced a novel idea for the newly converted catholics of Chanda. Their Christian identity was revealed, developed and matured through this seven point programme. By this Bishop Januarius visualized the uniqueness of Christianity in the context of other religions. A religion introduced for the first time should stand out with its charism and fruits in the sight of other believers if it has to make any impression or impact on the people. Moreover the ideals of Christian community should be a source of inspiration and encouragement for the non-believers. Out of these convictions there emerged a well-knit plan of a seven point programme.

This programme is much more than certain Christian values. It aims at a higher realm of life which is both Christian and truly human. This in fact synthesises the secular and the sacred. They signify the prime values to be imbibed by individuals for a healthy social life. In this respect the programme was adaptable even to non-Christians. In fact it was to reverberate in the larger society outside the Christian community.

The Seven point programme could be divided into two groups.

a) The first group consists of symbols of the Christian family. These physical symbols are reminders of spiritual and social duties to the believers. These symbols add substance and vitality to the religious life of every believer.

#### (i) *Cross of Christ*

Cross is the symbol of supreme sacrifice. It calls one to offer oneself after the model of Christ our saviour for one's neighbours. Every one should be a cross-bearer for the sake of others. Through the supreme sacrifice of abnegating oneself, one learns to be a true follower of Christ. The act of bearing others' burdens has lasting effect on the society. The self-abnegation is meant for every one in the society irrespective of caste, colour or religion. It is for the entire humanity. In brief the cross becomes a sign of universal brotherhood and fellowship. The charisma of kenosis inherent in the symbol of the cross is salvific. As Christ saved the entire humanity once and for all through the one time death on the cross, this symbol of the cross forever calls every believer to be a cross-bearer of his/her neighbour.

Cross is also a symbol of one's salvation. It is through the cross that every human being is saved. The salvation of humanity came through the cross. As a silent reminder, the cross becomes loud and clear when it takes wings through the human behaviour. Cross of Christ is a consolation and comfort to the dis-hearted and depressed. It remains a symbol of hope for the errant and the erratic.

## (ii) *Picture of Christ*

It is the depiction of the personality of Christ. The picture is an incentive to the believer to grow and mature into the personality of Christ and to be dynamic and committed as Christ. The magnetic personality of Christ is the universal model for an ideal human life. Christ who was fully human and fully divine set the supreme model for human behaviour. "Christ who went about doing good to all" naturally becomes the criterion for the follower of Christ. In Christ one finds the model for every human behaviour. 'Being obedient to his parents' (Lk. 2: 51), 'Growing in favour and wisdom' (Lk. 2: 52) Christ remains a model for every student, for every human person. 'Feeding the hungry and needy' (Mt. 15: 36-37), 'Jesus whose heart was touched, and who was deeply moved and who wept' (Jn. 11: 33-35; Mt. 14: 14) is a prime model of sympathy and empathy. 'Curing people from all types of physical and mental diseases' (Mk. 1: 32-34) Jesus liberated all those who were in physical or mental bondage. 'Instructing his disciples to choose the lower seats in the party' (Lk. 14: 7-14) Jesus taught the code of conduct in the society. 'Jesus who retired to mountains to converse with his Father' (Mt. 14: 13) and 'taught the people how to pray' (Mt. 6: 5ff) bequeathed a charism of greater union with the creator and the creatures.

## (iii) *Bible*

It contains the word of God, which is the answer to many human problems and it plays an important role in the lives of believers.

## (iv) *Lamp*

Lamp symbolizes Christ, who is the light and guide to the believer. Christ who said 'I am the light of the world' (Jn. 8: 12) permeates the entire being of the believer at the sight of the symbol of lamp.

Through these physical symbols lives of Christians are rejuvenated and enlivened in a special way at sunset everyday in the families. Their faith in Christ is expressed through the evening prayer, during which they touch all the above symbols and perform *aarathi* to Christ their saviour. The veneration of these symbols is a daily expression of their Christian identity. Through these acts they re-enact their faith in Christ and their discipleship. This is a means to keep Christ live in them.

b) The Second group consists of symbols of Christian behaviour. Their faith in Christ is visible through their daily lives. In the words of late Bp. Januarius "by these symbols of Christian behaviour Christ in us becomes manifest". The seeds of Christianity sown in the multi-religious context have to be distinctive, excellent and fulfilling to the people of God. Hence the symbols of Christian behaviour played a vital role in witnessing Christ among the non-believers. It is through these symbols the new Christian community reach fruition. The symbols of Christian behaviour are the following.

(v) *Communitarian prayer*

The communitarian prayer is practised both in the parish level and family level. The whole atmosphere of prayer is set in such a way as to bring the people of God together. They together approach their common Father. This 'Abba' consciousness and approach to the Almighty strengthens and deepens their ties between them and their fellow brethren. The feeling that the whole humanity as the children of the one Father is the net outcome of this communitarian prayer.

(vi) *Unconditional forgiveness*

"Forgive our sins as we forgive others" (Mt. 6: 12) is the basis of this symbol of Christian behaviour. The mark of every Christian believer necessarily consists of unconditional forgiveness, as a condition for divine forgiveness. This is the approach to the whole humankind as our brethren. The generosity to extend this forgiveness to the entire humanity unconditionally begets forgiveness from the Father. Accepting others as they are is the basic attitude behind this symbol.

(vii) *Sharing*

The motto of late Bp. Januarius "Let us share everything dynamically divine" underlies this symbol. Sharing is natal to

Christianity. 'They shared everything they had among the community' (Act 2: 44) is ensured through this symbol of Christian behaviour. A basic attitude of right approach to material goods as a family gift of God to the entire humanity is manifested through this sharing. 'Abba consciousness' coupled with the sense of being the children of God makes this sharing a reality.

The above three symbols are the basis and criterion for the 'new society' and the 'new human' envisaged in the mystery of the incarnation and redemption. As a result of the practice of the above symbols, a Christian becomes a sign and source of inspiration for all others. The members of the other religions will naturally accept Christ even if they do not formally declare themselves to be believers.

### From the Periphery to the Centre

(a) The mission methodology adopted in Chanda was thoroughly people oriented. In the words of the founder Bishop Januarius "Our contacts were family to family and with small village groups. We started from the periphery, the abandoned, difficult areas and slowly moved to towns and cities". The result was encouraging. Because in the remote areas people wanted the missionaries. The missionaries worked for the total liberation of people after the example of Christ who could do wonders. Their whole-hearted effort to implant a local church while upbringing the lot of the poor through education and social work was quite welcome. The so called educated and enlightened in the cities and towns came to know of the birth of christianity in the interior villages only at a later period. It took years to form these communities in the remote areas of the diocese. In the process of evangelization it had to pass through many stages for the people to be convinced and to embrace Christianity. As Edward Le Joly says "they saw, they read, they listened, they prayed and they learned. Most of them came face to face with Jesus. They heard the Lord call them by name. They left everything and followed Him".<sup>2</sup>

### (b) *Proclamation of the gospel*

"Evangelization is the explicit proclamation of the mystery of Christ and a direct invitation to adhere to his gospel."<sup>3</sup> As regards

2. Fr E. Le Joly SJ, *Evangelization: Theory and Practice*, St. Paul, Bombay, P. 88

3. Bernard Haring, *Evangelization Today*, p. 43.



the illiterate masses in the interior villages the proclamation of the gospel was relatively easy. Education of the masses together with the gospel values found encouraging results if not completely fruitful. The village mission was and still is a fertile field for the word of God. Hence Chanda is still such a field even today for direct evangelization. In fact the first three decades of the experiments in Chanda included direct proclamation of the gospel.

### (c) *Inculturation in the experiments*

"Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces people, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. If the church does not diffuse the message within its communities and *ad extra* by means of proclamation, she does not become a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission".<sup>4</sup>

Inculturation played an important role in instilling the Christian values in the minds of the people. As always was the practice in the church, in Chanda too the gospel was introduced in their culture. Sacraments and Sacramentals in the vernacular. Bhajans and dances in their own way also contributed to lively celebration of the liturgy and other community celebrations and prayer. Fundamental renewal from within underlined all these adaptations and inculturation.

### Our Vision of the Future

In the first phase Chanda has created basic Christian communities all over the diocese, concentrating mainly on the periphery. These communities more than two decades old in most cases have to be the leaven in the future.

The well instructed "new breed" from the boardinghouses of Chanda gives a lot of hope for the future. Besides the formation of new Christian families the future generations will learn the first lessons of faith from their parents. In many areas the whole village is converted to Christianity and many a family is on the path of conversion.

Mathew Kaniamparampil

---

4. *Redemptoris Missio*: Pope John Paul II, No. 52.

# Interreligious Dialogue: a Sharing of Hope

The Church as a pilgrim by its very nature is in dialogue with the people of other religions. It is often called "inter-faith" dialogue, as basically oriented towards sharing of one's faith with the people of other faiths. The author suggests that a more reasonable focus of dialogue is hope. For Christians hope is the meaning of existence they experience in and through the person of Jesus Christ. This hope in Christ cannot be separated from the authentic meaning of existence that any human person experiences. It is communicated through symbols which evoke a response in the other and lead to the praxis of promoting communion in all dimensions of reality.

A meaningful dialogue, whether interreligious or intra-religious, cannot but be a sharing of meaning. The immediate question that arises in the mind is, "meaning of what?" [Is it only a sharing of the meaning of one's own religious beliefs and practices among the partners in dialogue for the sake of information to rectify some of the misconceptions about them? Or does it serve the purpose of sharing the insight into the meaning experienced and lived through the particular religious traditions? Interreligious dialogue can have a minimal agenda. It can aim at clarifying the meaning of one's religious beliefs, correcting misconceptions and helping to shed the prejudices of all partners in dialogue. This is also of vital importance as it is absolutely necessary for any peaceful co-existence in a multi-religious society. But meaningful interreligious dialogue cannot be reduced to a simple sharing of some information on religious matters. If religions claim to deal with the ultimate concerns of human beings, interreligious dialogue must aim at sharing that ultimate significance which each one experiences in and through a particular religion.

In recent years much has been written about the 'why' and 'how' of interreligious dialogue. The interest of Christians to enter into dialogue with other religions and secular society is undoubtedly of recent origin. The new self-understanding of the Church and

the new vision of her mission emerging from the Second Vatican Council has prompted the Church to enter into a new kairological moment in her life and mission. This kairological moment<sup>1</sup> is the renewed commitment to mission through dialogue, and eventually a commitment to dialogue as mission. If the Church is essentially missionary, it means that it is essentially dialogical. Certainly there are various ways of understanding this dialogical existence of the Church. It may range from a narrow vision of considering dialogue as a means to evangelisation and conversion to a broader vision of having religious dialogue for its own sake. The latter view considers dialogue as the way of Christian existence and the communication of its meaning enriched by the dialogue itself. A formal dialogue that is carefully prepared and well advertised is only one form of dialogue, perhaps not the most important one. The dialogue through life in all ways of interaction and interpersonal relationship, at all places and at all times defies the norms of a formal dialogue. Like life itself dialogue cannot be easily structured without losing its own dynamism and vitality. In the following pages an attempt is made to clarify what I think would be the possible content or the 'what' of a meaningful dialogue between the Pilgrim Church committed to Christ and the followers of other religions, whatever be the mode of this dialogue.

### 1. Dialogical Existence of the Pilgrim Church

A real dialogue takes place when the partners in dialogue have something meaningful to share. In interreligious dialogue, what a person shares with another is an articulation of the ultimate meaning he/she experiences in and through his/her religious tradition. In an atmosphere of openness, transparency and mutual respect such an encounter among persons of different religious affiliations would undoubtedly be enriching. As R. L. Howe puts it, "Dialogue, therefore, produces miracles of discovery, opening to us the miracles of life".<sup>2</sup> However, such an enriching discovery seems to be the privilege of only a few who are constantly on a search to find ways and means of bringing together people of differing faiths to live in harmony and peace. Such an enterprise could also be the private interest of an individual who wants to improve his/her vision of the ultimate meaning of life by entering into

1. R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (Bangalore: ATC, 1983), p. 232

2. Reuel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: Seabury, 1963), p. 11

dialogue with the people of other faiths. But for the Church dialogue is not a private luxury or merely a means of social relationship in a multi-religious society. According to Schillebeeckx, "Dialogue is the proper and distinctive mode of existence for the unique witness of the Pilgrim Church".<sup>3</sup> The other religions and the secular world provide the Church a real opportunity to bear witness in a unique way, and thus to be "Church".<sup>4</sup>

In the conciliar and post-conciliar period it may appear obvious to some that the Church is dialogical by nature. But it was not so in the past. Any monotheistic religion would consider its socio-religious body the exclusive representative of the Divine Revelation and of the assurance of salvation to its members.<sup>5</sup> It would not accept other religions as equal to it. Many of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church like St. Augustine held the view that the existence of other religions and cults was a sin against the commands of God. So any contact with another religion was of a polemical nature and consequently in the first medieval centuries every theological treatise was an apology for the true faith and an attack on the others.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the Church was monological in her attitude until the Second Vatican Council.

The Council discovered the dialogical nature of the Church. The Church does not claim any more, as in the past, the exclusive possession of the means of salvation. The idea of "no salvation outside the Church" is liberated from the narrow and even distorted interpretations (AG 7; GS 22; LG 8, 16; NA 1). Moreover, the Church recognizes in other religions the "seeds of the Word" (AG 11, 15) and the reflection of "a ray of that truth that enlightens all peoples" (NA 2). However, subsequent papal documents on the question of dialogue do not seem to go as far as the Council's self-understanding of the Church vis-a-vis other religions.<sup>7</sup> Both the important papal documents that raise the issue of the Church's relation with other religions, namely, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI and *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* of Pope John Paul II

3. E. Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1986), p. 126.  
4. *Ibid.*

5. Aryeh Grabois, "The Christian Jewish Islamic Dialogue in the Twelfth Century and Its Historical Significance", in *Tantur Year Book 1976* (Jerusalem: Ecumenical Inst. of Advanced Theological Studies, 1979), p. 69.  
6. *Ibid.*

7. See J. Kuttianimattathil, "Elements of the Emerging Trends in the Christian Understanding of Other Religions" in *Vidyajyothi* 59 (1995), pp. 281-284.



consider other religions as only the natural striving of human beings to reach God, which does not succeed in establishing a relationship with Him. On the contrary, Christianity succeeds in this because the initiative comes from God himself.<sup>8</sup> This cautious approach to dialogue with other religions, with clear distinctions between Christianity and other religions, might have been intended to contain the enthusiasm of those who are seriously engaged in interreligious dialogue since the Second Vatican Council, and to console those who were confused about it, or even strongly opposed to such an enterprise.

A positive approach to other religions, more in line with the conciliar documents than the above mentioned papal documents, is found in the document published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples ("Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ"). This document does not hesitate to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in all authentic religious traditions. It recognizes the response of these people to God's invitation to salvation when they follow the dictates of their conscience and practise sincerely what is good in their religious traditions. In other words, their striving towards God, is not a futile, uninvited attempt to reach God but the consequence of their response to a previously proffered grace of God. This is also the approach of the Church towards the Indian religious traditions as clearly expressed by the document, *Guidelines for Inter-Religious Dialogue*, of the CBCI Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism. The document affirms that religious pluralism is a divine Gift and the relentless search for God in India is not an unaided groping but is sustained by the active presence of God's Spirit. The Church in India realizes that a dialogical existence is the only way for her to unfold her vocation to be "Church" in a multi-religious society.

For some, the Church seemed to be forced into dialogue with other religions. "Why should the Church dialogue with other religions when she possesses the absolute truth and knows the sure way to salvation?", they ask. They seem to think, that if dialogue is not for the sake of conversion to the true faith, it is a sign of one's uncertainty about the superiority and absoluteness of

---

8. See *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 6.

Christian revelation. They do not find any need to change the traditional Christian approach to other religions. Though many followers of the other religious traditions welcome the Church's new attitude of openness to dialogue with them, some are suspicious about the motivation of those Christians who are enthusiastic in initiating interreligious dialogue. They seem to doubt whether it is not just the legendary missionary zeal for conversion appearing in a new appealing garb. But those who are convinced of the self-understanding of the Church as the 'sacrament of dialogue'<sup>9</sup>, as E. Schillebeeckx puts it, consider that the Church does not possess the Truth but is possessed by the Truth and is called to communicate her experience of meaning and hope in that "truth that sets everyone free" (Jn. 8: 32b). She must listen and discern the presence of the Spirit in all those sincere strivings of human beings for ultimate meaning in their life. She must challenge the other religious traditions to experience the 'fruits of the Spirit' and allow herself to be challenged by them in her commitment to believe, live out and proclaim her Christic experience. So the Pilgrim Church cannot but be dialogical by her nature and vocation. Whatever be the apprehensions about dialogue, and however different the understanding one has about the nature and purpose of dialogue, it is increasingly becoming clear that the Church realizes that to be the 'sacrament of dialogue' is the way of being and way of life for the Pilgrim Church.

## 2. Interhope dialogue beyond Interfaith Dialogue

The Church being a 'sacrament of dialogue', the content of what she shares with her dialogue partner must needs be a sharing of the hope that is in her. Perhaps no clearer expression of what a Christian believer needs to communicate with others who do not share his beliefs is found in the NT than in 1 Pet. 3: 15a-16b: "Give an account of the Hope that is in you ... with gentleness and reverence." Peter mentions not only what is to be communicated but also the way of communicating it, recognizing the otherness of the other.

The option for an interhope dialogue beyond interfaith dialogue is not a mere change of terminology in interreligious dialogue. Such an option of sharing one's hope beyond one's faith liberates any interreligious dialogue from superficial exchanges

---

9. E. Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man*, p. 124.

of vague articulations of one's own religious beliefs or a discussion on any neutral themes to which the partners may not be seriously committed. Any serious inter-faith dialogue would reach a stage at one time or another when the sharing of one's beliefs takes place. These beliefs, articulated in dogmas and doctrines, are not free from the cultural context in which they were formulated. No dogma or doctrine is free from the limitations of the philosophical presuppositions, the world-view and the language in which it is formulated. Dialogue becomes a frustrating experience at this stage, when one realizes that one cannot communicate the meaning one attaches to these doctrines in one's life to someone who does not share the particular world-view or philosophical presupposition behind the formulation of the doctrines. Probably this is the reason why most interreligious dialogues cannot go beyond sharing the same platform to shower pious platitudes and appreciation for one another's religion and end with some common prayers that would give a good feeling to the participants.

Hope defies dogmas and other doctrinal articulations. Therefore, it overcomes the hurdles connected with dogmas and doctrines during interreligious dialogue. Hope is enfolded in symbols and metaphors and they are the best means to communicate it. Symbols unite while definitions divide. In the sharing of one's religious hope symbols and metaphors fulfil their function of evoking a response in the other at a deeper level, where one is constantly searching for meaning in life. Hence, interhope dialogue can take place only among persons who acknowledge their present situation as *already* and *not yet* with regard to their awareness of the meaning of their existence. The hope that is shared is not a futile and illusory hope or a mere utopian ideal, but one which has its basis in what is already accomplished in one's life. "If hope is the name of the human spirit as conative openness to reality, as outreach in search of the meaning and value of life",<sup>10</sup> as Michael J. Scanlon puts it, and if religion is the expression of this hope, then interreligious dialogue must be the sharing of hope among the partners of dialogue. For a Christian partner in dialogue the content of what he shares is the hope which impels him to move from an initial experience of meaning to a deeper experience of the

---

10. Michael J. Scanlon, "Hope", in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Eds.) J. A. Komonchak et. al., (Bangalore: TPI, 1993), p. 493.

meaning of life in relationship with the other humans, the world and God. This hope is not sought as a private luxury but with an awareness of its implications for the rest of reality.

### 3. The Content of Hope

The content of the hope that a Christian shares with others cannot but be the meaning of existence he or she experiences in and through the person of Jesus Christ. This does not mean sharing with others theological reflections about the uniqueness of Christ in comparison with or contrast to other saviours and mediators; or a discussion on the importance of the doctrines of the Church vis-a-vis the doctrines of other religions. The hope that spurs a Christian on in life is the encounter with Christ as the absolute meaning of his or her life. This hope is not an illusion. It is a living experience in which one finds his or her unique place and irreplaceable role in the network of relationships that make up the totality of reality. For a Christian, therefore, encountering Christ is a heightened experience of finding the meaning of existence in relation to the totality of reality. This enables one to see not only his own or her own *belongingness* to everything that is human, 'worldly' and divine but also that of others. In that radical belongingness and communion one recognizes the meaning of life. A Christian experiences this transformation effected and gifted through his or her commitment to Christ. So for a Christian the transforming encounter with the person of Christ as the meaning of his or her life is the moving gentle force behind any interhope dialogue with others.

The question that can be legitimately raised is about the need for such an interhope dialogue. Is it not enough that a person find the meaning of life in the encounter with Christ and be happy about it? Why should it be shared through dialogue, if there is no ulterior motive of winning over others to follow this way of experiencing meaning? After all, Christians feel that they are called to proclaim what they believe, and their 'missionary zeal' is legendary. Is it possible that this zeal to evangelize lurks behind any apparently innocuous interhope dialogue? All these questions, however legitimate, are irrelevant when one understands the nature of the hope that gives meaning to a Christian.

The hope that is experienced by the Christian through Christ cannot be separated from the authentic meaning of existence that



any human person experiences. J. Macquarrie expresses it poignantly when he paraphrases the prologue of John by translating *Logos* as *Meaning*. "All things were made meaningful, and there was nothing made that was meaningless ... Every human being has a share in Meaning, whose true light was coming into the world. Meaning was there in the world and embodying itself in the world, yet the world has not recognized the Meaning, and even humanity, the bearer of Meaning, has rejected it."<sup>11</sup> It is the experience of meaning that gives a Christian the hope that drives him or her to follow the implications of that experience in dialogue with all those who find meaning in their lives even if they do not recognize or acknowledge Christ as the source of their hope. Such an interhope dialogue need not have any motive beyond that of deepening the understanding of the meaning one has found in Christ and of responding to the implications of hope together with others whose lives are determined by the hope they have encountered.

The mystery of belongingness to reality through the Christic experience needs to be constantly discovered. The hope that sustains life is not given in its fullness. Neither is it given once and for all. The eschatological fulfilment of hope must grow out of one's commitment to the creation of a historical and this-worldly situation of hope. Thus the hope of a committed Christian becomes related to the hope of all. All humans who struggle to overcome every dehumanizing discrimination on the basis of gender, race, caste, class etc. as well as those who struggle to remove the causes of violence, war, and the unnecessary destruction of nature and natural resources are partners of an interhope dialogue. The hope that sustains them cannot be dismissed as utopian. Deep within any authentic commitment and enthusiasm to contribute to the creation of a new world of harmony, peace, fellowship and respect for nature one may discern the presence of the Spirit of God, who blows wherever He wills and renews the face of the earth. However, this does not mean that any interhope dialogue can be reduced to a mere discussion of social or ecological issues or even the formulation of some action-plan to reform the situation to which the partners in dialogue are committed. An interhope dialogue may indeed include such an agenda. But a Christian partner in dialogue knows for

---

11. J. Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, (London: SCM Press 1990), p. 106.

certain that the hope that he or she experiences can neither be reduced to the dream of creating an earthly paradise nor to a belief that human beings are able on their own to build a new society where everyone enjoys well-being. It is not a false expectation of the coming of an exclusively other-worldly paradise in no way related to this world. An authentic Christian can give an account of the hope that is in him or her by sharing the conviction that the 'new world waiting to be born' is both a gift and a task. It is the commitment to the task that will evoke enthusiasm in others and lead them to inquire into the 'gift' dimension of the hope and ultimately the giver of it.

The best symbol of this hope is Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God. The Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, too, expected the coming reign of God. But for Jesus it was not a mere participation in this general expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. The hope of the coming of the Kingdom irrupted from within himself, from his unique and intimate relationship with his *Abba*. It was from this *Abba*-consciousness that he realized that in and through him the Kingdom would be inaugurated. Therefore his commitment to the implications of this hope was so radical, that he chose to give up his life rather than to give up his hope. Such a hope has enormous power to draw many to share it and to find meaning for their lives by committing themselves to its challenges. For a committed Christian, therefore, the hope that is to be shared through the symbol of the Kingdom of God is not a utopian ideal of God's reign where justice, peace, love and reconciliation prevail, but it is rather the experience of it as a gift and the realization of its implications for society and the world as a task. It is an awareness that no system on earth can usher in the Kingdom of God which will become a reality when the gift of the Kingdom is accepted by the humans in solidarity with one another. Hence interhope dialogue becomes the means to build up solidarity among human beings of good will.

#### 4. Prophetic Challenges to Hope

In the process of interhope dialogue all authentic religions will discover not only the depth dimension of the hope they share but also their prophetic mission to one another. When the implications of one's hope are challenged with gentleness and reverence, an openness to such a prophetic challenge will enable the possessor of the hope to be self-critical about its interpretations in practical life.

Among the religions in dialogue such prophetic challenges to one another are necessary because no religion is free from the perversions of authentic hope by superstitious and false expectations and dehumanizing ideologies and practices. An authentic hope can be belied through various causes which are historical, cultural, institutional etc. Human selfishness and the temptation to dominate and control others can create systems and structures which hinder the realization of the hope that brings about true communion among humans in relation to the World and God.

The Church realizes that since it is her vocation "to reveal the mystery of God, who is the ultimate goal of man, she opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is the truth of his own existence".<sup>12</sup> Her prophetic mission to other religions who offer their own ways of experiencing the meaning of human existence is to challenge false interpretations of ultimate meaning and consequent attitudes and practices that do not promote communion and well-being of the whole of reality. The Church herself needs to be challenged by other religions as to whether she remains in faithful commitment to the hope that gives meaning to her existence. Such a prophetic challenge of other religions to the Church will make her more self-critical about her approaches and attitudes, her structures and institutions, to see whether they promote her vocation to give 'an account of the hope' that is in her or on the contrary, hinder it. Therefore, interhope dialogue is not just one of the apostolates of the Church but is an essential dimension of her being 'Church', and of fulfilling her mission.

## Conclusion

It is the hope that gives meaning to her existence which impels the Church to enter into dialogue with other religions who share the same hope in their own way. Interfaith dialogue, as it is often understood and practised, cannot fulfil this urge of the Church to communicate the hope within her because interfaith dialogue suffers from the inherent problems connected with it. Faith, when communicated through its various articulations in beliefs, cults and codes, fails to evoke a response because the articulations can rarely penetrate the world-view of the partners in

---

12. *Gaudium et spes*, 41.

dialogue. Moreover, neither the official position of the Church nor the theological opinions concerning interreligious dialogue are free from ambiguities about its aims and relevance. A sincere interfaith dialogue may overcome prejudices one has about the religion of the other partner, but may not touch the hearts of the partners and lead to communion. But an interhope dialogue where the hope which gives meaning to one's life is communicated through symbols can evoke a response in the other and lead to the *praxis* of promoting communion among all the dimensions of reality. Further, interhope dialogue fulfils the prophetic mission of each authentic religion to other religions, challenging them to be faithful to the hope they share. The Church needs to become more aware of her responsibility to be a 'sacrament of dialogue' by promoting interhope dialogue to fulfil her mission as 'Church' in a multi-religious society.

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth  
Pune — 411 014

Jacob Parappally



# Missionary Dimension of Islam

The Quranic idea of mission was to invite all to the way of the Lord full of wisdom and beautiful teaching. Islam felt that it was superior to other religions and hence only tolerated them. So its attitude was one of inclusivism, that is, it included all truths, and was the best guidance for all people. Mohammad is considered the last and final seal of all prophets. Islam's unique conception of God forced the Muslims to consider all those who worshipped anything other than God idolaters. So Islam was a religion of conquest. In India, however, the presence of a good many Muslim mystics had a harmonizing influence among different religions. The paper discusses the contemporary missionary movements in Islam.

## 1. Introduction

The true meaning of "Mission in Islam", (*da'wa'*) as in other religions, is to invite all people to live in peace with God, with others, with oneself and also with nature. Since Islam considers itself *the* religion, perfected and chosen by God to be *the* religion of humankind, it claims a God-given missionary mandate to invite all peoples to embrace Islam in order to enjoy peace in its fullest sense. But unfortunately the use of the "sword" by some over-zealous rulers in the past to procure "conversions" from other religions has tarnished the image of Islamic mission in the world. The rise of fundamentalist groups among Muslims down the centuries also has contributed significantly to the common opinion that they are all out to convert others to Islam using all possible methods. A humble attempt is made in the following pages to throw some light on certain aspects of the missionary dimension of Islam, which are often forgotten by Muslims and others while dealing with this topic.

## 2. Quranic concept of Mission

The Quranic concept of mission may be found in the following verse: "Invite (all) to the way of Thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful teaching; and argue with them in the ways that are best and most gracious. For thy Lord knoweth best who have strayed from His path

and who receive guidance" (16:125). According to Yusuf Ali, in this wonderful passage are laid down the general principles of preaching Islam to the people of other faiths.

We must invite all to the Way of God, and expound His Universal Will; we must do it with wisdom and discretion, meeting people on their own ground and convincing them with illustration from their own knowledge and experience which may be very narrow or very wide. Our preaching must not be dogmatic, not self-regarding, not offensive, but gentle, considerate, and as such would attract their attention. Our manner and our arguments should not be acrimonious, but modelled on the most courteous and the gracious example, so that the hearer may say to himself, 'This man is not dealing merely with dialectics; he is not trying to get a rise out of me; he is sincerely expounding the faith that is in him, and his motive is the love of man and the love of God.'<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, that these noble principles of preaching Islam to others have not been very honestly followed by those who tried to propagate Islam. In fact, it is not very easy for any serious minded and earnest missionary of Islam to uphold the above mentioned principles since there are certain factors inherent in the very fabric of Islam that make its preaching difficult and problematic.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Claim for Superiority

a) Every religion is unique and so we cannot subscribe to the oft repeated saying that all religions are equal. But the Muslims have a feeling that theirs is the best religion. The following Quranic verses can be cited to support this claim: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you and have chosen for you *Islam* as your religion" (5:3). Those who reject Islam are threatened with the severest punishments. "Those who reject Faith — neither their possessions nor their numerous progeny will avail them aught against God: they are themselves but fuel for the Fire" (3: 10). "Say to those who reject Faith: 'Soon you will be vanquished and gathered together to hell — an evil bed indeed to lie on'" (3: 12).

1. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran*, Text, Translation and Commentary. Vol. I, Delhi, 1981, p. 689.

2. For a detailed study of this topic see: George Koovackal, "Inherent Problems in Islam's Encounter with other Religions", *Journal of Dharma*, Vol. XIX: No. 4 (1994), p. 384.

Though the Jews, Christians and Muslims constitute the "People of the Book" and are united in the common fatherhood of Abraham, the Muslims are advised to keep away from them: "O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who takes them for friends is (one) of them. Verily Allah will not guide a wrongdoing folk" (5: 51).<sup>3</sup>

The Islamic attitude towards other religions is very clear from the following verses.

If any one desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who lost (all spiritual good). How shall God guide those who reject Faith after they accepted it and bore witness that the Apostle was true and that clear signs had come unto them. But God guides not a people unjust (3: 85-6).

Yusuf Ali explains the meaning of the above cited verses as follows:

The Muslim position is clear. The Muslim does not claim to have a religion peculiar to himself. Islam is not a sect or an ethnic religion. In its view all religion is one, for the truth is one. It was the religion preached by all the earlier Prophets. It was the truth taught by all the inspired Books. In essence it amounts to consciousness of the will and plan of God and a joyful submission to that will and plan. If any one wants a religion other than that, he is false to his own nature, as he is false to inspired Books. Such a one cannot expect guidance, for he has deliberately renounced guidance.<sup>4</sup>

b) The Quran speaks of itself as the best guidance for humankind: "Ramadhan is the (month) in which was sent down the *Quran*, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong)" (2: 185). Only the Quran contains the fullness of God's revelation. Other Scriptures may have inspired verses but only in a fragmentary form.

---

3. It is also to be noted here that Christians are considered to be the closest friends of Muslims: "Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans: and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say 'We are Christians'" (5: 85).

4. Yusuf Ali, Op. Cit., 145

"He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning). They are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical seeking discord... And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord" (3: 7).

Since the followers of earlier religions have corrupted their scriptures, God has revealed the Quran through Muhammad as a compendium of all previous scriptures and so it contains God's revelation in its fullness without any error. "And unto thee We have revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever scripture was before it, and a watch over it. So judge between them by that which Allah hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee." (5: 48)

c) Muslims also believe that the line of prophethood has come to an end with Muhammad since he is considered the final prophet. "Muhammad is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the prophets" (33: 40). All the prophets from Adam upto Muhammad were national prophets and so their message was restricted to a particular people. Jesus, for example, was a prophet for the people of Israel (Mt. 15: 24). But Muhammad was sent as a prophet for all human-kind. "We have sent thee to all men as a bearer of good news to all" (34: 28). "It was meant for all mankind, to whom, if they turn to God, it is a Message of the glad tidings of His Mercy, and if they do not turn to him, it is a warning against sin and the inevitable punishment".<sup>5</sup> Non-believers in the prophetic mission of Muhammad will be meted out with severe punishment. "As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the hereafter, nor will they have any one to help" (3: 56).

However, the above consideration should not lead one to neglect another important aspect of Islam, namely, its universal character.

Say, (O! Muslims) We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and (in the books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets, from their Lord. We make

---

5. Yusuf Ali, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1142.



no distinction between one and another among them, and to God we bow our will (in Islam) (3:84).

To believe in some prophets and to reject others is a great sin (*Kufr*) in Islam. "Those who wish to separate God from His apostles saying: 'We believe in some but reject others'... they are in truth (equally) unbelievers (4:150-2).

d) The Islamic concept of God is mainly responsible for the aggressive attitude exhibited by some Muslim rulers and missionaries towards the followers of other religions. The belief in the oneness of God (*Tawhid*) is the corner stone of Islamic faith. God is one in His person, attributes and in His works.

He is God, the One and Only, God the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not; nor is He begotten; and there is no one like unto Him (112).

This concept of God is certainly praiseworthy since it tries to safeguard the pure monotheism of the semitic faith. But the problem started when in their overenthusiasm some Muslims started hating and fighting the people of other faiths calling them idolaters! *Shirk*, or idolatry (associating gods with God) is the greatest sin in Islam.

God forgiveth not (the sin of) joining other gods with Him; but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins than this... Whosoever ascribeth partners unto God hath wandered far away ... their habitation will be hell, and they will find no refuge therefrom (4:116 ff).

The muslims are asked to fight against the idolaters. "Wage war on all the idolaters as they are waging war on all of you" (9:36). They are not even permitted to come near the sanctuaries of God. "The idolaters are unclean. So let them not come near the Inviolable Place of Worship" (9:28). "As for such, their works vain and in Fire they will abide" (9:17). The Muslims are prohibited even to pray for the so called idolaters even if they are closely related since God is against them and has cursed them and has prepared hell for them (9:113; 58:6).

It is also important to note here who all belong to the category of idolaters. In order to glorify the mission of Muhammad many a muslim writers have given a very dark picture of the pre-Islamic Arabia. The native Arabs have been depicted as ignorant and

immoral idolaters. The Christians were also counted among the idolaters because of their belief in the holy Trinity and also in the divinity of Jesus. According to the Quran Jesus is only one among the prophets and so to call him "Son of God" is the most blasphemous sin.

O People of the Book! Commit no excess in your religion; nor say of God aught but truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an Apostle of God, and His Word, which bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His Apostles. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for God is One God: glory be to Him: (Far exalted is He) above having a son (4: 171).

Yusuf Ali's commentary on this passage clearly indicates the Islamic position towards the Christian understanding of Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ.

Here the Christian attitude is condemned, which raises Jesus to an equality with God; in some cases venerates Mary almost to idolatry; attributes a physical son to God; and invents the doctrine of the Trinity, opposed to all reason, which according to Athanasian Creed, unless a man believes, he is doomed to hell for ever.<sup>6</sup>

From the above mentioned considerations one could imagine what would be the Islamic attitude towards the followers of Indian and other tribal religions whose followers exhibit many traits of idolatrous belief and practices.

Islam, thus, from its very beginning with a superiority feeling that Muslims are the best community, Quran is the only book of revelation in its totality, Muhammad is the final prophet and the followers of other religions are unbelievers and idolaters, started its mission of bringing back the humankind to monotheism as enshrined in the pages of the Holy Quran.

#### 4. The Mission of Muhammad (570-632)

At the age of 40, when Muhammad was spending the month Ramadhan in prayer and fasting in the cave of Ghar-i-Hira the archangel Gabriel is said to have visited and told him that God has chosen him as His messenger to the whole humankind. The following verses were communicated to him:

---

6. Ibid., p. 233.

“Proclaim (*Iqraa*)!<sup>7</sup> in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created — Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And thy Lord is most bountiful — He Who taught (the use of) Pen, taught men which he knew not (96: 1-5).

After a pause of three years Muhammad is said to have received a clear mandate:

“Arise and deliver thy warning! And thy Lord do thou magnify! And thy garments keep free from stain! And all abomination shun! Nor expect, in giving, any increase for (thyself)! But for thy Lord’s (Cause) be patient and constant (74: 2-7).

It is to be remembered here that Muhammad was an unlettered man. But being divinely illumined and strengthened he began to preach secretly among his intimate friends and members of his clan and later publicly in the city and suburbs. The content of his preaching was not any direct appeal to become Muslims but a change of hearts. He insisted on the belief in the One Transcendent God and on worship of Him without images or symbols in order to avoid the danger of idolatry or polytheism. He invited people to charity and warned them of severe punishments after death for those who led immoral life on earth. All those who would surrender their will to God unconditionally would become members of the new community of believers called Muslims. Equality of all believers without distinction of caste, clan, colour or sex is a basic tenet of the newly formed community. He also advocated better treatment for the weaker sections of society especially the poor, women and the orphan children. When the ruling and influential business men of the City of Mecca opposed his views and his followers were persecuted Muhammad with his companions migrated to Medina in 622 where he established a community granting freedom of worship to members of other faiths. He had to fight many battles to defend his followers. Finally in 630 he conquered Mecca without any bloodshed and thus established Islam as the religion of the land since all other tribes had accepted him as their prophet and ruler. He died in 632 with the satisfaction

---

7. *Iqraa* may mean “read”, or “recite or rehearse”, or “proclaim aloud”. From this Arabic root comes the word “Quran” which may mean that which was read, recited or proclaimed (to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel) or it may also mean that it is to be read recited or proclaimed (to mankind by Muhammad).

that he had fulfilled the mission that was given to him by God namely to unite the people of Arabia into one community of believers in the One Transcendent God of Abraham.

## 5. Early expansion

The early spread of Islam in Saudi Arabia and in the neighbouring countries like Iraq, Iran, Syria, Palestine, Egypt etc. was undoubtedly linked with the political and military expansion of the early Muslim community. It is to be clearly understood that in Islam there is no strict separation of religion and politics. So one could say very conveniently that Muslims are a religio-political community. Immediately after the death of Muhammad many tribes and groups revolted against Muslim leadership. Abu Bakr (d. 634), the first Caliph, subdued them and sent them forth to expend their fighting energy under the able military commander Khalid al-Walid. Twenty per cent of the booty was offered to the soldiers as an incentive to conquer the neighbouring countries. However, the main religious impetus for the expansion of Islam came from the idea of *jihad*, struggling or fighting for God's cause.

In practical terms it (*jihad*) meant converting countries which were *dar ul-harb* (a place of war) into *dar ul-Islam* (the abode of Islam), not in the sense that every one was expected to become a Muslim ... but in the sense that the overriding ethos and social set-up should be Islamic in nature ... Anyone who died fighting in the *jihad* became a martyr (*shahid*) and was assured of entry into Paradise. For those who survived on the other hand, there was a generous share of booty and a government stipend.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is to be noted that the Arab conquerors were not very keen to convert all the conquered people to Islam as this would inversely affect their steady flow of income. After a military conquest the defeated people were given option either to become slaves with the threat of death or to become Muslims and avoid further punishments and persecutions. The Christians and Jews, being the "People of the Book" were offered one more choice namely to pay *jizya* and *kharaj* (protection tax, agricultural tax). Since these taxes were too burdensome many Christians and Jews opted out to become Muslims. The spread of Islam

---

8 George Koovackal and Paul Jackson, "The Spread of Islam", in *The Muslims of India*, edited by Paul Jackson, Bangalore, (1988) p. 115.



in North Africa, Central and South Asia also took place through these methods with some variations. The interest and involvement of traders in becoming Muslim missionaries also has contributed greatly to the spread of Islam in many parts of the world.

## 6. Spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent

It is impossible to give a detailed description of the growth of Islam in the Indian subcontinent in this paper. Prof. K. A. Nizam has aptly described it in one sentence: "The growth of Muslim society in India took place through four processes — conquest, conversion, colonization and migration".<sup>9</sup> Military invasions were largely responsible for the beginning of Muslim presence in North India. Though many people were killed, kingdoms overthrown, and temples destroyed, the main preoccupation of the Muslim conquerors was obtaining booty and political control. Forced conversions did occur in North India, but that was not the main factor for the increase of Muslims there.

As opposed to the North Indian experience Islam started its growth in South India through a process which may be called "Peaceful penetration".<sup>10</sup> This was initiated by Muslim Arab traders who were well-received in Kerala by the Hindu rulers and people. This gave a new dimension to the Islamic missionary enterprise in India and gave birth to a very strong Muslim community now known as "Mappila Muslims". This pattern was extended to other parts of South India where significant conversions to Islam took place largely from lower Hindu castes mainly for socio-economic reasons.

Sufficient scientific attention has not been given so far to the role played by Muslim mystics in the spread of Islam in this subcontinent. In fact, Muslim community in India grew mainly through conversions from the tribals and low castes as a result of the presence and peaceful persuasion of Muslim mystics. They handled the delicate process of conversion to Islam with great care, understanding, sympathy and love. The Chisti saints of Ajmer attracted many Hindus to the Islamic way of life without demanding formal conversion to Islam or initiation into the mystic way of

---

9. Nizami K. A., "Islam in Hind", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. III, E. J. Brill Leiden, 1971, 428.

10. Miller Ronald, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala*,

life. Even the fact of conversion was kept in secret in order to avoid social disturbances.

Sufi saints became more powerful missionaries, perhaps, after their death. Hindus would not visit a mosque, but have no difficulty in visiting *Darghas*, the shrines or tombs of saints, for seeking God's blessings and favours through the intercessory power of the saints. Though this was not a thing very much encouraged in orthodox Islam, in the Indian context it had a great appeal to the ordinary poor people and led to their conversion to Islam.

India had trade relationship with Arab countries and so some of the Arab traders, who became Muslims even at the time of Muhammad, brought their newly found faith also to India. The early Muslim traders, who had come with their families, began to settle down in South India. Besides, these Muslims married native women and the children who were born in mixed marriages were also brought up as Muslims.

About the Muslim settlements in North India that took place because of migrant Muslims Nizami writes as follows:

Population pressure and disturbed conditions in the Central Asia and Persia drove large numbers of Muslim families to India 6th and 12th and 7th and 13th centuries. Later the Afghan rulers invited many Afghan families to come and settle in India. Many Shia families migrated from Persia and settled in the South. The process of Muslim settlement under the Hindu *rajyas*, which had begun with the Arabs, continued also later... With the establishment of Turkish rule, these early Muslim settlements turned into great religious and cultural centres.<sup>11</sup>

The missionary spirit diffused in India through the Islamic institutions like *masjids*, *madrasas* and *khankahs* also should be remembered here.

The *masjids* sustained the external structure of the faith; the *madrasas* supplied the intellectual nourishment, while the *khankahs* ensured that the fervour of spiritual life did not freeze in the day-to-day life of the community.<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Nizami K. A., Op. Cit., P. 429.

12. Ibid.

## 7. Organized Missionary Movements — Modern Period

a) Though Islam is a missionary religion, organized mission work developed in it only by the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Having been exposed and influenced by the various activities of Christian missionaries under the colonial rule the Muslims also started similar works to spread Islam mainly in Asia. According to Christian Troll the original *concept of Da'wa* has undergone three noteworthy changes. (a) Losing its juridico-political nature it assumed the character of a testimony to the faith and thus making the 'call' and admonition as a serious and sincere effort. (b) Going beyond mere proclamation organised works of faith of different types were introduced as a means to witness Islam. (c) *Da'wa* became institutionalized in a new way to reform Islam within and also share its principles with others.<sup>13</sup>

The present day missionary activities in the Indian subcontinent are mainly spearheaded by two movements called *Tablighi Jama'at* and the *Jama'at-i Islami*. Hence, a brief information on them is given below.

b) The *Tablighi Jama'at* or Faith Movement—It was started by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), a descendant of a highly respected and deeply religious family of divines and Sufis from Doab, Uttar Pradesh. He started his renewal programme of Muslim community among the inhabitants of Mewat, a large rural area to the south-west of Delhi. The Meos had become Muslims many centuries ago but were not well trained to lead an Islamic way of life in its fullest sense. So Ilyas with a few companions travelled all over Mewat to propagate the fundamental principles of Islam. Later the number of his followers increased and many groups were formed to preach the 'Word of God'. He exhorted committed Muslims to leave their homes and profession for a period of time in order to undertake this preaching mission on the pattern of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad. The movement became very popular and the effects of this 'Islamicization' mission are described as follows:

A dislike for Hinduized garments was created and people began to dress themselves according to the specifications of the *shari'a*

---

13. Christian Troll, "Two Conceptions of *Da'wa* in India: *Jama'at-i-Islami* and *Tablighi Jama'at*" *Islam* Vol. 16, No. 3: (July 1995) p. 129.

Bracelets got removed from the arms and rings from the ears of men. Beards were grown freely and without compulsion. Polytheistic ceremonies that had become a part of marriage began to be discarded. Usury lost its hold, drinking almost came to an end and crimes became less frequent. Religious indifference and innovations and lewd and profane habits and customs started withering away in the new climate of faith and piety.<sup>14</sup>

Muhammad Ilyas died in 1944. But the movement flourished under his successors and expanded to all parts of the Indian subcontinent and gradually to most of the countries of all continents. Conventions are now held regularly by the *jamaats*. Even non-Muslims are invited to attend such conventions. The aims and objectives of the movement are summarized as follows:

(1) *The inculcation of a missionary spirit.* This was the important duty of the prophets. After the death of Muhammad, the final prophet the Muslims as a community have the responsibility to continue the mission of the prophets. "If God causes you to lead a single person onto the right path — it is better for you than to possess the world with what it contains."<sup>15</sup>

(2) *The acquisition and transmission of knowledge:* The Quranic command "O Messenger! Convey to others that which has been revealed unto you from your Lord..." (5: 67) is to be taken seriously by all Muslims.

(3) *Enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong:* Ilyas puts this obligation as follows:

If anyone sees a wrong being done, he must set it right with his hand; if that is not possible, then with his tongue; and if that also cannot be done, then he must at least abhor it from the core of his heart, and that is the poorest faith (iman).<sup>16</sup>

The *Tablighi Jama'at* has grown in numbers and also in its impact upon the Muslim community. Its methods and programmes also have undergone changes, especially in its outreach to the members of other faiths and to Western world.

14 Nadwi S. Abul Hassan Ali (1979): *Life and mission of Maulana Mohammad Ilyas*. Lucknow: p. 40, as quoted by Troll, Op. Cit., p. 134

15. Ilyas Muhammad, *A call to Muslims*, Lyallpur (1944) p. 7.

16. Ibid, p. 10.



(c) *The Jama'at-i Islami*: Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979) started this religio-political movement in 1941. According to him the Indian Muslims have departed from the teachings of the Quran and the Traditions (*Sunna*) of Prophet Muhammad and the rulers have gone away from the God-fearing rule of the righteous Caliphs. This is the root cause of the decline of Muslims in all fields of life. To remedy this Mawdudi proposed that "the supreme purpose of Islam was to establish the sovereignty of God on earth by means of a truly Islamic State."<sup>17</sup> To meet the challenges posed by the Western and non-Islamic ideas he felt it necessary to create a small, informed and dedicated and disciplined group of Muslims to capture social and political leadership. In other words, his ultimate aim was to convert India into an Islamic State, since one could lead a genuine Islamic way of life only in a country ruled by Muslims in accordance with the Islamic principles.

In 1947, when Pakistan was created, Mawdudi and his followers started operating from there and a few members decided to stay back in India and they reorganized the *Jama'at-i Islami* into a new organization called *Jama'at-i Islami Hind*, having its own constitution, without any organizational links with its counter part in Pakistan. Being in a Hindu majority country, the *Jama'at-i Islami Hind* modified its aims and objectives and advocated an 'Islamic revolution'.

The *Jama'at* conceives of the Islamic revolution as a twofold process. It exhorts Muslims to purify their personal lives of all things un-Islamic, to live up to the injunctions of Islam and lead an honest life as moral and upright citizens. To non-Muslims it offers the principles of Islam for dispassionate consideration, not with the intention with somehow converting them to its faith...<sup>18</sup>

The *Jama'at* has asked its workers to establish widest possible contact with all country men — Muslims and non-Muslims — and to secure their cooperation in their works without compromising on principles. The following quotation shows clearly the missionary character of *Jama'at-i Islami Hind*:

---

17. Christian Troll, "Two Conceptions of Da'wa in India: Jama'at-i Islami and Tablighi Jama'at" *Sal'aam*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (October 1995), p. 147.

18. From the official publication of the *Jama'at-i Islami Hind*, *Introducing the Jama'at-i Islami Hind*, as quoted by Troll, Op. Cit., p. 150.

In respect of non-Muslim brothers, efforts will be made:  
 (1) To establish sincere brotherly relations with them: to remove from their minds the misunderstandings about Islam.  
 (2) To see that they become acquainted with the real and comprehensive concept of Islam to the extent that they realize the significance of the concept of the Oneness of God (*tawhid*) and the value of this concept in human affairs, realize clearly the necessity and importance of Divine Guidance and the prophethood of Muhammad... together with a clear perception of the truth that Islam is the one religion revealed to mankind in all countries and at all times for the reformation of the inner and outer self of man, solving the problems of life...<sup>19</sup>

The *Jama'at-i Islami Hind* has a dialogical attitude towards the members of other faiths. The officially published pamphlet "The Invitation to the Truth and the non-Muslim" asks the members of the *Jama'at* and the Muslims in India in general, to cultivate a universal outlook, an attentive openness to the moral and spiritual values of the non-Muslims... encourages initiatives of dialogue about all the moral and religious questions that arise in the shared national life.<sup>20</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

The interest and involvement of the whole Muslim community in sharing their faith with others certainly deserve special appreciation and serve as model for the rest of humanity. However, it is already time for the Muslim community to examine the propriety of upholding the above mentioned theological reasons as the intense driving force for their missionary efforts. This may not take place in the near future since the zeal of the fundamentalists is still generously encouraged and supported by the rich Arabs.

Dharmaram College  
 Bangalore — 560 029

George Koovackal

<sup>19</sup>. As quoted by Troll, Op. Cit., P. 153.

<sup>20</sup>. Op. Cit., P. 155.

# Hindu Missionary History and Methods

In spite of claims to the contrary Hinduism because of its profound religious experience is missionary since the sages wanted to share their experiences with others. Following the ancient policy of conquering Aryans tried to impose their values on the Dasyus. So Hinduism was vigorously propagated to the whole of South East Asia. If Buddhist kings like Asoka helped spread of Buddhism Hindu kings did the same with regard to Hinduism. Though Muslim domination restrained Hindu missionary activity, missionary movements remained within Hinduism, and with the Hindu renaissance Hindu missionary activity also revived through Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, RSS and others.

Hinduism is not a missionary religion. Its tolerance of other religious traditions is proverbial. It is a model for every religion. Such are the impressions which are propagated. In a lecture delivered by the great indologist Max Muller in Westminster Abbey on the day of intercessions for missions in December 1873, he presented Hinduism as non-missionary:

The Brahmins never attempted to proselytize those who did not by birth belong to the spiritual aristocracy of their country; their wish was rather to repel intruders, and they even punished those of other creeds who happened to be near enough to hear their prayers or to see their sacrifices.<sup>1</sup>

Max Muller's purpose was to impress on the audience that Hinduism was dying or dead.<sup>2</sup> Such a statement from the great indologist added weight to the assumption that Hinduism is non-missionary.

This article proposes to examine critically the missionary character and activity of Hinduism in the past, in the present and the methods followed. Much research deserves to be done in this

---

1. Referred to by A. C. Lyall in *Asiatic Studies, Religious and Social*, Vol. I, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 99-100.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

area. We seek to open up certain avenues of research rather than solve the problem or give a definite exhaustive answer.

### A false assumption

Any religious tradition by the very fact of being a religious tradition is missionary by nature. A religion contains certain religious experiences and values which have life in them. They are by their nature communicative. Their very presence, in so far as they are cherished and lived, is a living witness and renders religious traditions missionary. So the assumption that an explicit command or doctrine enforcing missionary activity is not required for a religion to be missionary.

In Hinduism itself a missionary dimension is amply present because of its profound religious experience and its faithfulness to such values as humility, simplicity, renunciation, peace and so forth. This is one reason why Max Muller's prophecy failed. We find a rejuvenated Hinduism everywhere. It does not mean that Hinduism engaged itself in missionary activity. Hence the historical development of *Sanātana dharma*, the eternal law or religion is to be studied. Though vedic religion is not Hinduism proper, yet it has to be the starting point since it is an important source of later religious development.

It is not possible to have a chronology of the development of religion in India due to lack of historical documents. The dates are approximate. For the sake of convenience the missionary history of Hinduism may be divided into two periods, from the *Samhitās* to Sankaracharya (1500 B. C. — 850 A. D.), and from Sankaracharya to our own days or modern times.

### From the Samhitas to Sankaracharya

The Hindu scriptures do not give explicit reference to missionary activity. Yet there are unmistakable evidence of it.

The Ṛgveda refers to *Dasas* and *Dasyus*. The name *Dasas* and *Dasyus* in opposition to *Aryas* designated a people of non-aryan race. *Pāṇis* are also often mentioned as enemies of the Aryans.<sup>3</sup> They were not yet fully conquered or reduced to slavery. They were wealthy and powerful. Some were kings. In the

---

3. For details about *Dasas* and *Dasyus* and *Pāṇis* see Abel Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique d'après les Hymnes du Rig-Veda*, Vol. 2, Librairie Honore Champion, Paris, 1963, pp. 208-224; *History and Culture of the Indian People*



beginning *Dasas* seems to have been a contemptuous term used to designate the people of non-aryan race who fought against Aryans to preserve their independence and prosperity.

The main-difference between the *Dasyus* and *Dasas* and Aryans seems to be religious:

The *dasyus* were riteless (*a - karman*), indifferent to the gods (*a - devayu*), without devotion (*a - yajvan*), lawless (*a - vrata*), following strange ordinances (*anyavrata*), reviling the gods (*deva - piu*) etc.<sup>4</sup>

These observations in the *Rgveda* express indirectly a desire that the indigenous people follow the religion of the Aryans.

The general policy in ancient times was to impose the religion of the conqueror on the conquered. Did the Aryans do it? The Aryan conquest of India was progressive. It took centuries. During this period there were intermarriages with *Dasas* and some had adopted their ways. Probably to discourage intermarriages and keep racial purity, the class (*Varna*) system was established.<sup>5</sup> As the conquest progressed, the conquered were assigned to the fourth class in society as *Śūdras*. The poor also became the *Sudras*. The conquered were progressively initiated and assimilated into the vedic way of life and religion. An evidence of this progressive brahmanization is the fact that the *Sudras* were admitted to soma sacrifice.<sup>6</sup>

A special sacrifice *Vratyastoma* was instituted to receive the *Vratyas* into the *brahmanic* fold.<sup>7</sup> Scholars are not agreed upon who the *Vratyas* were. Here is a description of their characteristics:

The *Vratyas* were regarded as outcastes, and the *Atharvaveda*, *Panchavimśa Brahmana*, and the *Sutras* describe a certain rite intended to secure for them admission into the *Brahmana* fold. The *Vratyas* were a *nomadic* tribe (*Vrata*) and neither studied

---

The Vedic Age, Vol. I. Ed. R. C. Majumdar, George Allen and Unwin, London 1952, pp. 248-249.

4. *History and Culture*, p. 249

5. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That was India*, Fontana Collins, 1977, pp. 35-36. *Varna* the class had not yet become the caste system.

6. *History and Culture*, p. 45. "The *Sudra* cannot milk the cow for the *Agnihotra* - milk according to the *Kathaka Samhita* (XXXI,2), but the *Satapatha Brahmana* (V. 5 4.9) gives the *Sudra* a place in the Soma sacrifice and the *Taittiriya Brahmana* prescribes formulæ for establishing the sacrificial fire for the *rathakara* also who was counted a *Sudra*".

7. See Rajbali Pandey, *Hindu Samskāras, Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1982, pp. 120-122.

the Vedas, nor ploughed the land, nor traded. Their nomad life is further suggested by their going about in rough wagons, with herds of goats, wearing turbans and wielding a particular kind of bow.<sup>8</sup>

The *Dharmasūtras* describe the *Vratya* as an outsider, man of mixed origins.<sup>9</sup>

Some scholars consider *Vratyas* as non-aryan and others as aryan.<sup>10</sup> Probably the *Dharmasūtras* are more correct. They were of mixed origin, aryan and non-aryan. Brahmanic missionary activity is evident from their acceptance into the aryan society through *Vratyastoma*. While such conversions into the aryan fold were taking place, another powerful religious development overtook aryan society.

### The Upanisadic Period (750 - 300 BC)

The Upaniṣads as such do not give evidence of any missionary activity. There were many earnest seekers of truth and reality at this period. They are seized with a thirst for the knowledge and experience of Brahman. Gautama goes to the king Pravahana Jaibali to be instructed by him and Satyakama Jabala to Haridrumata Gautama.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there are persons who volunteer to instruct others in the knowledge of *Brahman*. Dripatabalaki offers to teach king Ajatasatru of Benares about *Brahman*. The king knew better than him. So Dripatabalaki becomes the king's disciple.<sup>12</sup> Yajnavalkya goes and instructs king Janaka of Videha.<sup>13</sup>

Seeking knowledge and experience of *Brahman* and volunteering to impart the same may not be called missionary activity in the strict sense. Yet one cannot but be struck by the missionary elan inherent in the experience of *Brahman* and in persons seeking it or seeking to share it. It is extremely hard to trace Hindu missionary activity during the period between the birth of Buddha and the first centuries of the Christian era. Buddhism is undoubtedly a missionary religion. Did Buddhist missionaries follow the Hindu Diaspora or Hindu missionaries the Buddhist? Serious study and research is needed to throw light on this problem.

### Hindu Missionary Activity in South East Asia

Hinduism spread to the far east most probably before the

8. *History and Culture*, p. 256.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Chandogya Upaniṣad*, 5.3; 4.4.

12. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2.1.

13. *Ibid.* 4.1.

Christian era. We may take it as an established fact that there were not only well-established Hindu colonies and communities but also Hindu kingdoms by the fifth century CE in South-East Asia.<sup>14</sup> Both historical and archaeological evidence favour it. The following points deserve attention: it is the conservative form of brahmanical religion which became predominant in South-East Asia; it is due to the vigour and vitality of brahmanical religions civilization, religious culture and art were absorbed by kingdoms of Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia. The kings patronized Hinduism because it helped them to establish their authority through *raja-dharma* and to raise the cultural standards of their people.<sup>15</sup> How did Hinduism spread to South-East Asian countries? It is a moot question.<sup>16</sup> In South-East Asia both Hinduism and Buddhism enjoyed the patronage of kings.

There seem to be two important reasons for the spread of Hinduism in South-East Asia:

Most of the kings of South - East Asia assumed the role of the supreme guardian of all the religious foundations of his realm. All these actions of the kings resulted in the uplift of the cultural standard of the people. *Of course the missionary Zeal of the Indian religious legates too did play its own part* but the great impact of Indian beliefs and faiths could not be possible, had the rulers not patronized them and had they not taken active part in expanding them. The king, therefore, was the supreme religious and cultural institution in most of the religions of South-East Asia. Nothing demonstrates more strikingly the absolute hold which the Indian civilization had over the native mind. It is only a story of great triumph against enormous odds. However, it seems that *Brahmanical religion was not probably much behind Buddhism in respect of missionary Zeal and proselytising activity.*<sup>17</sup>

Any effect must have an adequate cause. The missionary zeal of the Brahmins and royal patronage seem to be the real cause of the spread of Hinduism in South-East Asia. While Hinduism

14. For details see; Dawee Daweewarn, *Brahmanism in South-East Asia (From the Earliest Time to 1445 AD)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1982.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

16. E. U. Kratz. "Islam in Indonesia" in *The Worlds' Religions*, Ed., Stewart Sutherland and others; Routledge, London, 1988, p. 430.

17. Underlining mine, Daweewarn, *Brahmanism*, p. 24,

spread abroad, in India there was a period of decline with the rise of Buddhism, and loss of royal patronage. But soon there was a Hindu reaction.

### The Hindu Revival

The emperor Ashoka who reigned from (272-236 or 232 BC) became a Buddhist, patronized Buddhism and sent out missionaries. Soon Buddhism became the dominant religion of India. But by the twelfth century, this flourishing religion became a non-entity. The decline and disappearance of Buddhism cannot be attributed to one cause alone. Moral decadence, accumulation of riches by the monasteries, sectarianism, brain drain caused by missionary exodus to other countries, neglect of the laity were some of the internal causes of the decadence of Buddhism.<sup>18</sup>

There were external causes too. The hostility of the Brahmins played a role. Kumarila and Sankara persecuted Buddhists. Sankaradigvijaya of Madhava narrates that Sankara destroyed Buddhists from the Himalayas to the Indian ocean and Tibetan tradition says that the Buddhist monasteries began to tremble and the monks began to disperse pell-mell at his approach.<sup>19</sup> Scholars are not agreed on the extent of the persecution of Buddhists by the Hindus.<sup>20</sup>

The intellectual onslaught of Sankara coupled with persecution brought a decadent Buddhism to its end in India. Muslim domination and persecution also contributed to the disappearance of Buddhism. We are not directly concerned with the persecution of Buddhists as such but what it demonstrates: Hinduism is not that tolerant, pacific religion as it is proclaimed to be. Like any other world religion, there are also followers engaged in militant and even violent missionary activity. This does not in any way contradict the magnanimity, tolerance and peacefulness of millions of Hindus.

The Muslim domination of India restrained Hindu Missionary activity. All the same, there were missionary movements within Hinduism itself. The Nao-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva (1449-1568) in Assam was a missionary movement which reformed Vaisnavism

18. S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Kusumanjali Prakashan, Meerut 1987, pp. 383-394.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 394-395

20. For various points of view regarding Brahmanic hostility to Buddhism and the persecution of Buddhists, see *Ibid.*, pp. 395-397; 429-433.



and converted the followers of Śaivism and Śaktism.<sup>22</sup> The British domination of India and the internal causes such as superstitions, ignorance, polytheism, degradation of women brought about a decadence of Hinduism from the sixteenth century. But with the Hindu Renaissance, Hindu missionary activity began with renewed vigour.

### Modern Period

With the Hindu renaissance and proliferation of Hindu sects, the missionary activity of Hinduism assumed new forms and a magnitude hitherto unparalleled in its history. To describe them in detail would take volumes. Here I may only mention a few of these missionary movements even though they may deny the missionary character or pretend to be unaware of it. The Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS are militant missionary organisations while Ramakrishna Mission takes a more balanced approach.<sup>23</sup> Several Hindu Missionary movements have become world wide organisations engaged in preaching and spreading the sects to which they belong. To have some idea of the intense missionary activity that is going on I may quote one instance:

The world wide fame of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami later known as Srīla Prabhupada was to come after 1965 — after he arrived in America. Before leaving India he had written three books; in the next twelve years he was to write more than sixty. Before he left India he had initiated one disciple; in the next twelve years he would initiate more than four thousand. Before he left India hardly anyone had believed that he could fulfil his vision of a worldwide society of Kṛṣṇa devotees; but in the next decade he would form and maintain International Society for Krishna Consciousness and open more than hundred centres.<sup>24</sup>

22. For details Maheswar Neog, *Early History of The Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam, Sankaradeva and His Times*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1985.

23. *Religion in Modern India*, Ed. Robert D. Baird, Manohar, New Delhi, 1981 gives articles on *The Ramakrishna Movement, A Study in Religious Change* by George M Williams, pp. 55-79; *Political Hinduism: The Ideology and Program of Hindu Mahasabha* by Kenneth W. Fones, pp. 447-480.

24. Satsvarūpa, Dasa Gosami, *Prabhupada He Built A House In Which the Whole World Can Live*, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Los Angeles, 1994, Introduction, p. IX.

All these bear witness to the worldwide missionary activity of Hinduism. Now we may describe Hindu missionary methods from the time of the arrival of Aryans in India to our own days.

### Hindu Missionary Methods

The missionary methods of Hinduism may be classified under three headings: Firstly methods of ancient times, secondly methods of Hindu renaissance under two subheadings: Indirectly missionary methods of the moderate reformers and directly missionary methods of aggressive Hindu religious movements and thirdly, the most subtle methods of all, the Advaitic. I may repeat again that these are areas which need further study and deeper research.

a) **Ancient missionary approaches:** In trying to outline the missionary history of Hinduism we have already touched upon the methods too. So it is enough to summarize them.

*Brahmanization through reduction:* The term brahmanization is used here not in the sense of converting people and enrolling them as Brahmins. It means only that people are brought within the fold of brahmanical religion and a certain status is assigned to them. During the period of aryan invasion which lasted for few centuries, the conquered population were accepted as the fourth class, the Śūdras. There was no untouchability during this period.

Even today the same principle is followed by accepting tribals and assigning them a certain caste-status.

The class or caste status entitled them to a certain participation in the social and religious life of the community.

*Liturgical participation:* Sacrifices were celebrated with much pomp, chants, elaborate ceremonies and<sup>25</sup> external festivities and entertainments. These provided a powerful attraction to enter the brahmanic fold.

*The human gods:* The Brahmins considered themselves to be human gods (SB. 2.2 2.6). These claims must have also drawn believers and non-believers to the brahmanic faith as Brahmins were the intellectual elite and they alone were able to offer sacrifices which was thought to obtain anything they wished.

While Brahmanism progressed in India, it also spread to South-East Asia where it won over many populations.

---

25. A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads*, Vol. 2, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1970 pp. 313-347.

*The Conversion of Leaders:* Though we have no clear evidence of how leaders and kings of South-East Asia were converted, we know for certain that Hinduism spread in South-East Asia through the patronage of kings and leaders who had embraced Hinduism. Since Hindu culture and religion were intimately related the population that was converted accepted both.

*Hindu Inculturation:* A Hindu inculturation of the masses went hand in hand with the growth of Hinduism in South-East Asia. Both art, architecture and literature bear witness to it.<sup>26</sup>

While Hinduism spread abroad, Buddhism spread in India. Hindu missionary activity extended to Buddhists.

*Exploitation of Buddhist decadence:* By the seventh and eighth century, of the Christian era Buddhism experienced an internal decadence as mentioned earlier. Sankaracharya exploited it to the full by establishing orthodox Hindu Monasteries to protect and develop Hinduism. These monasteries were to be the bastions of Hindu orthodox tradition. They were prepared also to meet any intellectual challenge.<sup>27</sup>

*Intellectual offensive and Persecution:* Sankaracharya, one of the greatest Indian Philosophers unleashed an intellectual offensive against Buddhism by his advaita, non-dualism, coupled with persecution which fostered reconversions. Nirvana and Sunyata doctrines of Buddhism proved to be no match for the identity of *atman - Brahman*, the ultimate experience of non-duality.<sup>28</sup> Besides the intellectual approach Hinduism was always ready to absorb anything that could be assigned a place in its vast edifice.

*Assimilation:* Buddhism, especially, the Mahayana had taken from Hinduism, what was appealing to the people like image worship, prayers, folk-beliefs and rituals. In this way, Buddhism lost to some extent its identity. So it was a rather easy task to assimilate Buddhism into Hinduism by making Buddha into one of the incarnations.<sup>29</sup> This process of assimilation has always been in progress since Vedic times and is continued today. Missionary

26. See Daweewarn, *Brahmanism*.

27. *Ibid.*: See also, Kratz, *Islam in Indonesia in The World Religions*, pp. 427-431.

28. Goyal, *A History*, pp. 383-404.

29. Abstract speculations on *Sunyata*, and the vagueness of *nirvana* could not have a hold on the masses while the claim *Aham brahmasmi*, I am Brahman, made the one who claimed it Brahman *himself*.

activity of Hinduism did not cease with the disappearance of Buddhism.

Muslim conquest of India followed by British colonization reduced Hindu Missionary activity for a period of time to rise again with renewed vigour.

**b) Indirect missionary methods:** The purification of the Hindu masses from superstitions, superstitious practices, doctrinal renewal and social reforms gave inner vitality to Hinduism. Rather than dying, as Prof. Max Muller thought, these reforms imparted a new spirit. The activities of the moderate reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Debendranth Tagore, which brought about a renewal of Hinduism are so well-known that it does not need any elaboration. While the moderates were engaged in reform and renewal many launched into dynamic missionary activity.

*Direct Missionary Activity: methods:* The Arya Samaj enforced the following methods:

*Preaching:* The third of the Ten Rules adopted by the Arya Samaj reads:

The Veda is the book of all true knowledge. It is the prime duty of all Aryas to study and propagate the Veda to hear and preach it.<sup>30</sup>

Preaching alone is insufficient. People have to be instructed.

*Educational Propaganda:* One of the principles of the Arya Samaj is to diffuse knowledge and dispel ignorance. With this in mind, the Arya Samaj started schools to foster Hindu culture.<sup>31</sup> Education does not meet all the needs of the poor and the less privileged. They need attention.

*Philanthropic work:* Lajpat Rai writes: "Besides its religious and educational propaganda, the Arya Samaj engages in Philanthropic work on a large scale. Outside Christian Circles it was the first purely Indian Association to organize orphanages and Widow Homes."<sup>32</sup> Today a number of Hindu organizations are engaged in various charitable activities, motives ranging from purely human to religious and missionary.

*Reconversion:* The Arya Samaj instituted a new ceremony called *Shuddhi*, to reclaim converts with considerable success:

30 Goyal, *A History*, pp. 397-399.  
Vol. I, p. 36.

31. Bhakshi, *The Arya Samaj*,  
32, Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, pp. 79-110.



The Arya Samaj, being a Vedic church, and as such a Hindu organization, engages in the work of reclaiming those who have left Hindu society, and it converts everyone who is prepared to accept its religious teachings.<sup>33</sup>

Hindu organizations of a fanatical character use nationalism and politics to promote Hinduism.

*Fanning up Hindu nationalism:* The ideal of the RSS is a Hindu Nation, Hindu Rashtra. Its objective is socio-political and the means used are the same. In 1991, the RSS had 5000 full-time committed workers busy building the organization throughout the country.<sup>34</sup> Fanning up Hindu nationalism, religious sentiment and a sense of hurt pride which resulted in the demolition of Babri Masjid and so forth are recent events which are instances of a violent type of method followed while infiltration is more subtle.

*Social Penetration:* The RSS front organizations have spread into various fields.<sup>35</sup> The RSS concentrates on trade union movement, organizes women, children, students and peasants. It has several agencies of six categories such as associational-cultural groups, religious groups, educational-cultural groups, organizations for social services, press and publication agencies.<sup>36</sup> It gives us an insight into the immense missionary effort of the RSS to turn India into a Hindu nation. This attempt goes on two levels, quietly, even secretly as well as publicly.

One may object this is not the effort of Hinduism but that of a few fanatic organizations. But these are not the only societies or agencies. There are more subtle methods.

c) *The Advaitic method:* The most subtle of all methods is that of the Advaita consciously or unconsciously followed by it. It needs deeper study and research. Advaita claims its experience of the identity of atman-Brahman as the ultimate experience. It presents itself as superior to every other system of philosophy, religion and religious experience and subordinates everything else to it. Advaita believes itself to be the most spiritual, most universal, scientific and tolerant system. The only Absolute is advaita, all else is relativized.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 120, See also 121-133.

35. K. Jayaprasad, *RSS and Hindu Nationalism, Inroads in a Safest Stronghold*, Deep and Deep publications. New Delhi, 1991, p. 57.

36. Jayaprasad is describing RSS activity in Kerala. But it gives an insight into the systematic methods of the RSS. See *Ibid.*, pp. 206-232,

These claims have great missionary propaganda value; they have won followers too. Apparently these claims do not seem to be missionary while in fact they are so.

There is an intellectual assault on monotheism and what is personal <sup>37</sup> All these have a missionary impact in favour of Hinduism. *Mass Media* Literature and audio-visual means such as films are made use of on an unprecedented scale by Hindu societies and organizations. The numerous instances that we have seen prove beyond doubt the missionary character and dynamism of Hinduism.

### Towards a dialogical approach

As seen earlier a religion embodies some light, life and truth. Life cannot be stagnant, it is dynamic. As a consequence every religion is missionary by nature, its missionary dynamism depending on the intensity of the life it possesses. Unfortunately, this power was misused to create competition, rivalry and even persecution.

Today it is urgent that we take a broader outlook. Let each religion foster its missionary dimension and dynamism to promote justice, peace, and harmony among religions and nations. Let every man be free to follow the dictates of his conscience to which God is calling him.

### Conclusion

The history of Hinduism proves that it was and is a missionary religion. The modern period witnesses the intense missionary activity of Hinduism. Numerous methods social, religious, spiritual and even political are followed by it to spread its beliefs and practices. The missionary activity of religions will never become a problem, if they remain open to themselves and work for harmony, justice and peace.

Antony Mookenthottam

---

37. *Ibid.*, p. 207. More details see pp. 207–232

## Book Review

### *WE CHRISTIANS: A CHRISTIAN SELF-INTRODUCTION.*

Edited by John B. Chethimattam, Trivandrum: C. M. I. Publications, 1996.

This is a collection of twelve essays, written by a group of Carmelite priests who had gathered for a "live-together" at St. Xavier's Carmel House in Alleppy. Although all of the writers are themselves members of the Indian community, and are clearly knowledgeable in India's Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the volume is not a "dialogue" and certainly not a polemic, but, as Dr. Chethimattam explains in his brief but very clear Preface, "a believing Christian contribution to the ongoing conversion among all believers on religious issues".

Two things are especially striking about these essays: 1) the clear conviction that the Holy Spirit is indeed active in all the world's religious traditions well-before the "missionaries" arrive; and 2) a very honest awareness of the historical development of the Christian Scriptures and of the structure of the Church itself.

On this first point, there is no question that the authors are committed Christians and no sense of the indifferentism that sees all religious traditions as "equally inadequate". (Happily the book rejects the common, blandly liberal but fundamentally agnostic metaphor of "the blind men and the elephant" as a way of explaining religious differences.) If anything, the writers, and especially the editor, are deeply respectful of the insights and integrity of all the world's religious traditions, each of which can also be described as dependent on "revelation". But with all due respect for the plurality of these traditions, the writers insist that the human community is *one* and shares *one history*, in which each of the traditions has arisen. In the context of this one, shared religious history, Christianity is an *event*, the "news" of which must be "communicated" to all the human community (hence the legitimacy of "evangelization") but which is already relevant to each of the world's traditions by reason of its *own* fundamental concerns. Thus "interreligious dialogue and missionary work are complementary: Dialogue tries to bring out the best in the other's religion, while the missionary an-



nounces what he can to help the other realize and express his own faith more fully (p. 19)."

Although all of the world's religious traditions have arisen in history, Christianity as "news" of a particular event, claiming universal significance, must be especially attentive to the validity of its historical "reports". (Buddhism may well have historical roots in the illumination of Siddhartha Gautama but the Buddhist dharma does not have the same relationship to this event as the mission, death and resurrection of Jesus have to the Christian message). All the writers in this volume are therefore careful to distinguish the various stages and diverse contexts reflected in the "reports" and reflections of the Jesus movement which we now acknowledge as "the New Testament" — for example, the diverse contexts of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel and for the Sermon on the Plain in Luke.

But this concern to be consistent with the best available Scriptural scholarship is especially notable in Dr. Chethimattam's own contributions on "Jesus in a World of Religious Pluralism" and on "The Church". In the first of these essays the writer summarizes very carefully, and critically, recent writings by John P. Meier, John Dominic Crossan and Raymond Brown. (Brown's work on the infancy narrative does not quite fit here with the other two, since Crossan is concerned with the whole of the Gospel tradition, and even in his first volume Meier is setting out the ground rules for his study of the entire tradition, not just the infancy narratives). The writer is fair in his treatment of both Meier and Crossan but also critical of Meier's too facile separation of "faith" from history and also of Crossan's too facile generalization of one "Mediterranean sociology" to the entire Gospel world. Dr. Chethimattam is himself clearly committed to a "Christology from below" which will give full attention to the reliable historical evidence of how the New Testament developed from the "human experience and consciousness of Jesus about his own identity and mission and the experience of the disciples of Jesus regarding their Master (p. 100), but will also acknowledge that the testimonies of the disciples are testimonies to an event which they experienced as "revelatory" of "the presence of a divine person in an event of decisive significance for the whole human race (p. 105)." The crucial question which must be allowed for the historical investigation of the New Testament to make sense is "how God reveals himself". For this very question



the New Testament is written to answer! Close off this question, and the answer cannot possibly be heard.

With respect to church structure, *We Christians* clearly distinguishes the many stages through which church structure — e.g. a monarchical episcopate, even the various clerical orders — developed as the early church effected its growing separation from the Jewish community within which it was first formed. Protestant scholarship, it is said tends to emphasize the “discontinuities of this development: whereas Catholics emphasize continuity from the church’s origins to its later forms”.

There is much else in *We Christians* that deserves to be noted — e.g., an interesting phenomenology of faith, a somewhat difficult but again historically well-based summary of “Trinity, the Highest Metaphor for Understanding God”, and a very fine description of Christian culture as a religious culture. There is no separate chapter on liberation theology but there are many statements indicating a clear commitment to “the preferential option for the poor.”

Given the effort and care put into these contributions, one must ask, “Will the book succeed in its goal of presenting Christians to the non-Christian community?” It does, for sure, present an honest and accurate description of Christian faith. And if courtesy and respect for other religious traditions can win a hearing, the book will surely succeed. There is no religious imperialism here and no competitive salesmanship or “marketing” of Christianity. But much of the scholarship here is meant to clear up misconceptions of Christianity, often fostered by Christians themselves (e.g. with respect to “the Jesus of history — Christ of faith distinction”), and non-Christians may not be able to follow the presuppositions of what are in effect “family arguments”. Paradoxically, therefore, *We Christians* may be even more valuable in introducing Christians to themselves. The book would provide an excellent basis of discussion for laity and clergy on historical, philosophical and theological positions which are widely shared in the scholarly community but which are often unknown to the larger Christian community.

Director, Abp. Hughes Centre  
for Interreligious Dialogue  
Fordham University  
Bronx, New York

John W. Healey

- 1 The editorial board does not necessarily endorse the individual views of contributors.
- 2 Articles for publication should be sent to the respective section editors.
- 3 Books for reviews (two copies each) exchanges, queries should be addressed to the general editor.
- 4 Subscriptions are payable in advance.
- 5 Subscription starts with January / February issues.
- 6 Copies are sent by sea mail unless otherwise required. Air surcharges will be extra.
- 7 Please address your subscriptions to:

Jeevadhara

Kottayam - 686 041

Do not send it to anybody's name.

Those who send subscriptions by Cheque are requested to add also Bank Commission (Rs. 10 - 15).

### SUBSCRIPTION RATE

Indian	Rs. 48/- (Malayalam)	
	Rs. 60/- (English)	
	(Sea mail)	(Air mail)
Foreign	\$ 20	\$ 26 (Americas)
	\$ 24	\$ 30 (Canada)
	DM 30	DM 40 (Europe)
	£ 13	£ 16 (England & Ireland)

---

Printed at Theocentre Press, Kottayam - 686 041  
and Published at Jeevadhara Office, Kottayam - 41  
by J. Constantine Manalel

# **JEEVADHARA**

## **PRESENTS**

a Mature Vision of Religion  
a Liberation-based Social Perspective  
and a Spirituality  
relevant to concrete life-situations.

## **IT IS**

an incessant search  
for Truth at all costs  
and ever broadens  
your horizons of thought.